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Unspecified



# Un/certainty

*Sarah Pink, Yoko Akama & Symposium Participants*

# Un/Certainty

*Sarah Pink, Yoko Akama & Participants*



Design  
Research Institute



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**Design+Ethnography+Futures** is a research programme which seeks to explore how the future orientation of combining design + ethnography approaches invites new forms of changemaking, where uncertainty and the ‘not-yet-made’ is at the centre of inquiry. It brings the improvisory, playful, imaginative, sensorial and somewhat contested edges of both fields to create an opening to experiment with what might emerge out of an assembly of ideas, people, feelings, things and processes.

This publication focuses in on one of these concerns to ask what happens when uncertainty is placed at the centre of the agenda, and what we might learn from an exploration about harnessing the generative potential of uncertainty at the nexus of the design+ethnography relationship. It calls for a deep engagement with and interrogation of uncertainty and the ways that sites of uncertainty operate within specific processes of research/design. It takes first steps towards this by exploring the issues, challenges and joys of un/certainties as they were uncovered, expressed and reconciled by a group composed of some of the most innovative and interesting scholars and practitioners in the world over two days in December 2014.





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**Photos**

Participants





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# Introduction

28 participants

10–11th December 2014

15.35hrs

This symposium ambitiously explored two things in parallel. Firstly, how can we bring together Design and Ethnography in ways that we can deliberately step out of established disciplinary methodologies?

Our work, which has developed through a series of workshops and iterating research projects, has focused around concepts of unknowing, sharing, making, moving and disrupting.

This means moving into the future with people and challenging what we habitually do and think about. Secondly, how can we open up a space where we can question the taken-for-granted, trigger genuine surprise, play with the edges of boundaries and reconfigure ways knowledge is produced? This meant that, as convenors of the symposium, we also needed to experiment and step willingly into the unknown in how to run such an event.

Throughout 2014, we have been developing an agenda for our Design +Ethnography+Futures programme to propose a new meeting of design and ethnography through a focus on futures. Design+Ethnography+Futures builds on design anthropology and design ethnography, but is not exactly either of these. Our work, which has developed through a series of workshops and iterating research projects, has focused around concepts of unknowing, sharing, making, moving and disrupting. We are exploring how the future orientation of combining design + ethnography approaches invites different forms of change-making, where uncertainty and the 'not-yet-made' is at the centre of inquiry. It brings the improvisory, playful, imaginative, sensorial and somewhat contested edges of both fields to create an opening to experiment with what might emerge out of an assembly of ideas, people, feelings, things and processes.

We understand our work as being substantively engaged in processual worlds where ethnographers/designers are always working with emergent qualities and with people who share their journey into the immediate future. We go further than aiming to do 'better' design ethnography / anthropology; rather Design+Ethnography+Futures attempts to create an opening where a hybrid interweaving is underpinned by movement towards a common theoretical and conceptual foundation. Like our substantive engagements with future uncertainties, our exploration itself also challenges what it is that we habitually thought we already knew and did.



Since December 2013, Design+Ethnography+Futures has run a series of workshops with researchers from different disciplines (including and beyond design or anthropology). The workshops have ranged in format, from 3hrs to two days and between 12-30 participants. The notion and experience of 'uncertainty' is at the core of our inquiry, requiring us to interrogate what we think we know and question the assumptions and paradigms that are taken for granted in our respective disciplines as we move together towards what their intertwined futures might be.

The people invited to participate in the symposium are all practitioners whose work we find inspiring, and with whom we had sensed a shared orientation. Yet often because such relationships to certainty and uncertainty in practice are not articulated verbally, we wanted to make them more explicit, to call for reflection on them and to seek ways in which they might be articulated. Indeed this is particularly important when we consider how we are conditioned to be cautious of risk-taking. The risk-averse regulatory frameworks and cultures of ethics, safety, quality control and compliance of contemporary academic institutions seek to obscure uncertainty, through the construction of multiple scenarios for risk mitigation and problem resolution.

This symposium was above all a context where we will get to explore these ideas with the participants – by talking and engaging in workshop-like activities. By 'hacking' a traditional symposium format, we invited them to explore together ways not to know, rather than sharing what we each already know through argument and consolidation. In joining us in this endeavour, we asked the participants to 'let go' of their preconceptions, forego the need for a resolution, and enter into this together, to awaken and become more aware of the emergent. This iBook is an outcome of this experiment.

*Sarah Pink & Yoko Akama*





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## Un/certainty In Practice

This chapter focuses on how certainty and uncertainty might situate within practice, it asks how and where both of these are important. It makes an argument for why we need to attend to them, and moreover, why we need to revive, support and militate for letting go of certainty, and for some of the things that have gone before.





Because we were interested in understanding the ways in which certainty and uncertainty can be thought to impact on how we frame and go through our work, we asked all the participants to consider how and where feelings of certainty and uncertainty figured in their practice. Practice here becomes a unifying paradigm for participants, as we attempted not to differentiate between the approaches, methods, or disciplines of design and ethnography. Instead by asking about how people practice, feel in and about their practice, we were seeking to find principles and tacit ways of being in one's practice that could take us through ethnography and design. Thus forming a set of shared or collective expectations about what it feels like to be in one's practice. These can be thought of as a shared or collective orientation towards practice, which has implications also for where practice might lead.

The narrative framing of this chapter runs through the work of our participants. It is neither a collective argument or conclusion, nor an authorial account. It is a parasitical set of musings that have taken through the reading of the cards, texts and video recordings we introduce below. There is no systematic way of analysing these materials that would ensure that the interpretation we give here is objective, just or completely loyal. That leaves us with techniques that emerge from the practice of ethnography and design, such as, intuition, empathetic engagements with what we imagine others to feel, and the imaginative renderings of the worlds of others through our own.- which emerge in the practice of ethnography and design. Indeed this narrative 'framing' can be displaced; the chapter has three narratives, one is this written text, the second is the sequence of certainty cards produced by participants, and the third is the series of 100 word commentaries on where certainty and uncertainty figure in their practice written by participants.

### Reading the cards

The first task we set participants was to explore the question of where and how we felt certain in our practice. This might seem a simple question, but it is one that we do not often bring to the fore as researchers. The question is in part to do with where our 'comfort zones' are, but thinking about it more theoretically, it is also about what is habitual, reassuring and grounding in our practice.

We asked each participant to complete a card, which on one side asked: "I feel certain about/when ..." and on the other side was blank. The cards themselves tell our collective story. What follows is an interpretation of the feelings that were expressed on the cards, divided into a set of themes that also correspond





with contemporary theoretical and methodological trends. This is no coincidence, and we would estimate that the themes emerge from the collective consciousness of a group of people whose practice is already immersed in these themes, and the analysis of a researcher who is likewise engaged with them: the mundane, intimate and personal; the in between; movement; and looking back.

It is precisely the habitual and reassuring aspects of what we do in life that we tend not to speak about, because they are tacit, known through doing, often mundane, and they tend to be things we do not need to mention. They tend to be rooted in those things we think we can rely on. Whether or not they are as 'strong' as they might seem is arguable. Indeed, the certainty with which we feel them, can in itself be questioned, and is often when they are revealed to be

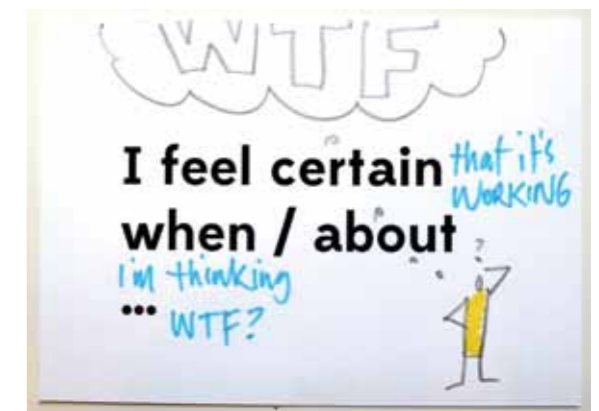
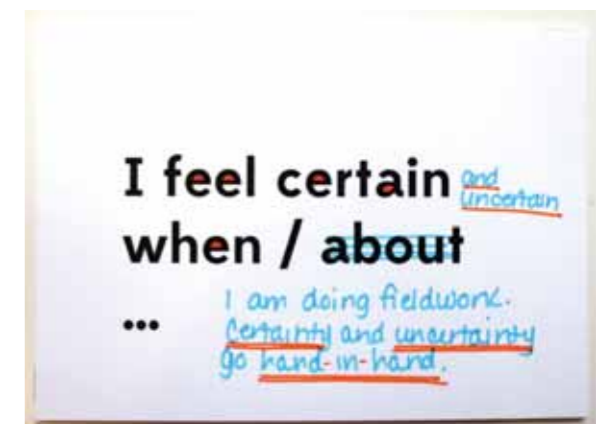
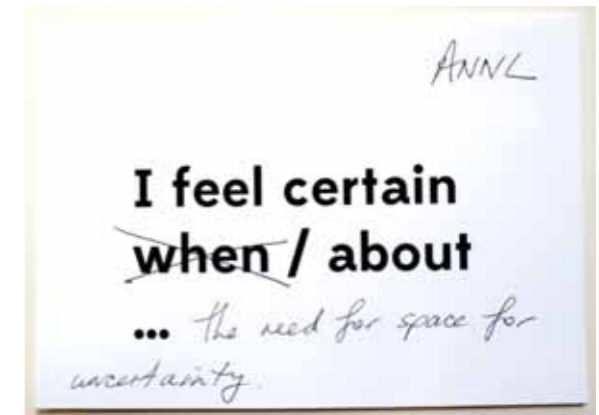
fragile. One of the themes that emerged from our collective exercise was that for some participants certainty became fixed beyond practice and in things that were 'natural', personal or deceptive. That is, certainty was found in those things that were beyond a world that could be rationalised, and were located in what could be thought of as the inexplicable. Certainty could be found in death, in "the sun rising tomorrow". Or it was located in a personal or intimate world "about the love for my partner and family", when with family or close ones, "about who I am" or in life. More cynically it was also located in belief



Top: Yoko Akama; Bottom: Alison Barnes

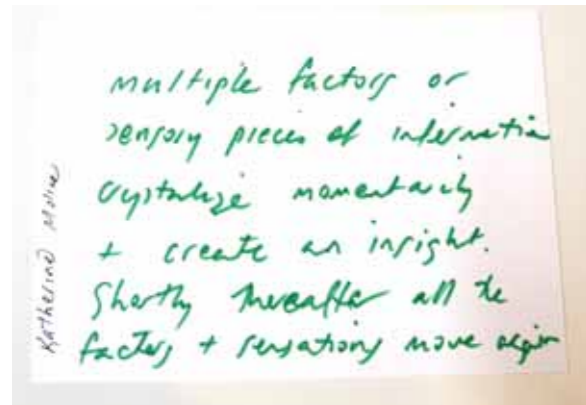
systems, when drunk on when you "fake it". Here we almost come to a denial of certainty in its very definition.

When speaking of research practice however, a theme of swaying in between certainty and uncertainty endured in the commentaries. We had set up the concepts of certainty and uncertainty as ways of thinking about our practice, yet the responses that fall into this theme challenges the binary. Binaries can be good to think with, and are nearly always problematised by the social sciences. How, we might ask, is a binary between certainty and uncertainty operable in an exploration of Design+Ethnography +Futures? The discussion in the previous paragraph offers one interesting perspective; that in fact certainty is felt as strong, but is inherently fragile, and therefore, when it was most confidently invested, this was in the personal, intimate, mundane and in belief systems. As we move back to practice in the next paragraph we begin to see where certainty can be positioned there too. First however it is significant to look at how certainty and uncertainty cannot but be part of the same thing; "when I am doing fieldwork certainty and uncertainty

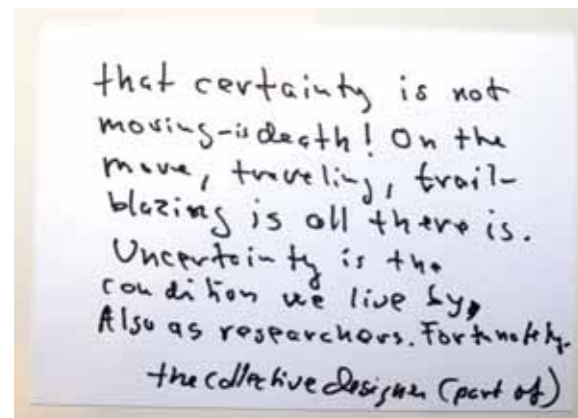


Top: Ann Light; Middle: Heather Horst; Bottom: Jeremy Yuille

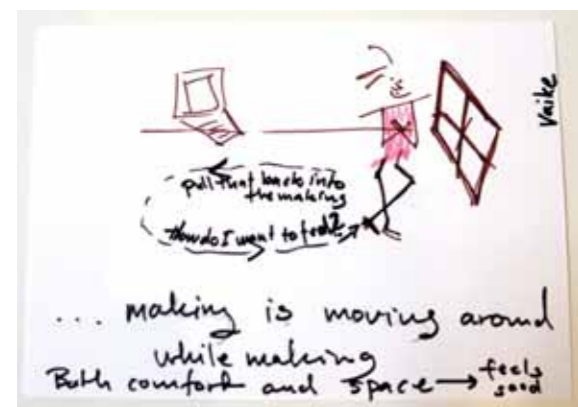
go hand in hand". Certainty might be invested in the theory and methodology, which frames the uncertainty of research. It might be "when ... I've heavily qualified enough", "I feel certain that its working when I'm thinking WTF", and "I feel certain about my delusions about practice". Here the confidence in the uncertain, the surety that it was there in itself can create a form of certainty,



or comfort a process or situation in not knowing: "I feel certain about uncertainty" and "I feel certain that ethnographic encounters are inspiring, generative and turn around the way I think about something that happens in the world".

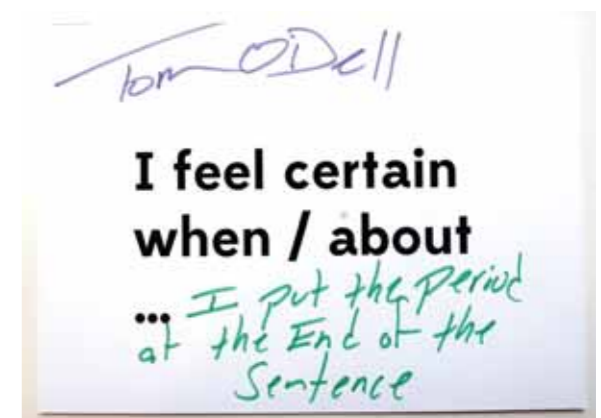


The temporalities of certainty and uncertainty were also, in this workshop brought together in ways that were disruptive. Sometimes, looking back and moving forward could almost be the same thing. But moreover certainty and uncertainty felt similar in some ways - making it clear that uncertainty is not necessarily an uncomfortable state, but a way of being generative, and a state of knowing. The binary of certainty/uncertainty here again is challenged. Movement was associated with uncertainty in a productive way: "Certainty is not moving - is death! On the move, traveling, trail-blazing, is all there is.



Top: Katherine Moline; Middle: Pelle Ehn; Bottom: Vaike Fors

Uncertainty is the condition we live by. Also as researchers. Fortunately". One could feel "trapped" or "bored" if too certain or static. It is not only researchers who move: "multiple factors or sensory pieces of information crystallise momentarily and create an insight. Shortly thereafter all the factors and sensations move again". Yet certainty can also be felt when we are on the move, when "I am in motion → dancing with texts, pens and paper, running with ideas in my mind" ... "making is moving around while making". People felt certain, "When I am writing", or in more detail: "I feel certain when I am making a text (to be spoken or published) and I feel I am 'sculpturing' it in right way, that is 'guiding' the paper/audience through the itinerary that is in the making while I write; as if I was the director of a symphony orchestra who needs to decide which instrument is heard at which time, and when its time for a chorus moment. Thus an embodied experience of many forms of art: and the art of the social". In these commentaries, moving and making become part of the same processuality, but there are also moments of definition, of pause and endings, where certainty is also felt: "I can draw it"; "I'm done/in retrospect"; in "patterns and plans"; "I put the period at the end of the sentence"; and when letting go, "making myself redundant" as in handing over to the students.



Together the cards tell a collective story. In this text we have tried to bring them together to tell a story about how and where certainty and uncertainty emerge in our work.



Top: Tom O'Dell; Bottom: Soile Veijola





The idea that certainty and uncertainty are not separate, opposed or binaries in our practice is perhaps not surprising, and indeed, when read through these narratives it feels somehow normal, reassuring in itself. Yet, we should not forget that there are other moments in which we are pinned against the wall by institutional strivings for certainties - by ethical approval or researcher safety processes. When inserted in a risk-averse narrative, certainty becomes imbued with a new feel.

It is not so much that certainty and uncertainty are fixed states that are pitched against each other, or that one of them is the opposite of the other. They are ways of feeling, of moving through and of making. Certainty and uncertainty are themselves contingent, they are felt in relation to the environments they are part of, generative of and generative in. If we are to take seriously the idea that our cards tell a collective narrative, then together they tell us something about the experience of certainty and uncertainty that matters to our agenda for developing Design+Ethnography+Futures research, that is different to the ways they are experienced in other research and research governance and regulatory contexts.



<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>...</p>	<p>My ability to help colleagues &amp; students with active reading &amp; integration of their ongoing texts</p> <p>Quite possibly <sup>quite possibly!</sup> delusional!</p> <p>Abby</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>...</p>	<p>Be space times too better just right</p> <p>Abby</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>...</p>	<p>to process I like to flip my mental and practical. But the practical is a proof, uncertain in form of its deduction. However, it is bounded by certainty, by a historical, autobiographical framework that organizes me into that certainty, but at the same time there's space for openness.</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>...   death... →</p>	
<p><i>in fortwettbewerb</i></p> <p>returning to the loom as a counter to the tyranny of representation.</p>	<p>the tyranny of representation</p> <p>The obligation or necessity to structure reflection &amp; focus in terms of goals, outcomes &amp; objectives.</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>...</p>	<p>... in the style of the artist's language...</p> <p>Certainty (basically)</p> <p>I feel certain when I share the screen (feel certain when making the music) I feel (more) certain when muscles move I feel (less) certain when muscles move</p>	<p>That observing &amp; accepting patterns of behaviour is helpful sometimes?</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... I JUST NEED TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENS NEXT.</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... WHEN I AM AFRAID THAT I WILL DIE.</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... I'm just about to feel uncertain (when it's not about)</p>
<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... I've barely qualified enough...</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... the need for space for uncertainty.</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... "PROBS" WILL BE "PROBS" FORMS TO FIND</p>	<p>I feel certain that I am a PhD student who is expected to complete certain tasks in a certain way within a certain time frame. I am certain if I cannot produce a thesis I will not be a PhD. Anything beyond this becomes less and less certain.</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... enough</p>	<p>to keep going when I forget my fears about what the next word or sentence should be and I let them draw me into them with pleasure.</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>...</p>	<p>the need to fall into uncertainty, or to listen to the materials gathering, or to trust when things appear, and that they will appear, but all of this is fleeting and can disappear.</p>
<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... I am being reduced (reduced and uncertainty) to read in detail.</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... Process ⇒</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... Being Different?</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... Being Similar?</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>...</p>	<p>WTF?</p> <p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... WTF?</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>...</p>	<p>about living with some...</p>
<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>...</p>	<p>multiple factory of messy piece of information crystalize meaning &amp; create an insight. Shortly thereafter all the factors + meaning were right.</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>...</p>	<p>I'm uneasy about certainty &amp; uncertainty but I'm happy to be unsure for me.</p> <p>Can we create some possibility of relinquishing - perhaps not in a loose term for me the certainty.</p>	<p>when the fit of my stomach is right.</p>	<p>I feel (slightly) certain when I manage to frame my uncertainty with sociological concepts that seem to make sense.</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>...</p>	<p>about living with some...</p>
<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>...</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>...</p>	<p>my own delusions about "practice"</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>...</p>	<p>I am probably wrong (when...)</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... I'M DONE / IN RETROSPECT</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... throughout encounter</p>	<p>we inspiring, collaborative, generative, and have around the way I think about something that happens in the world, Sarah Pink</p>
<p>that certainty is not moving-death! On the move, traveling, fruit-blazing is all there is. Uncertainty is the random we live by. Also as researchers. Forunately the collective (Sarah Pink et al)</p>	<p>turning music, redaction, making, the student into an academic (Sarah Pink)</p>	<p>Freedom afforded through a pointed creativity provides the feeling inside of "a trial", "a certainty".</p>	<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... I am in motion → dancing with text, proof and paper - dancing with ideas in my mind.</p>		<p><b>I feel certain when / about</b></p> <p>... I am writing and ...</p>	<p>making is moving around while making. Both comfort and space → feels good.</p>	<p>... This happens: many part of my body is relaxed. about the sun being there. about the love for my partner &amp; family. about who I am.</p>



## Reading the texts

The 100 word statements about where certainty and uncertainty figure in their practice are all authored by the participants, who we also consider to be authors of this book. We are not seeking to analyse them, but to carve one possible route through them, and to outline one of the stories they could tell. The statements were written after we had spent some time together, exploring certainty and uncertainty in conversation and seeking to identify where they lie in our practice. The texts brought to the fore, in words, the relationship between certainty and uncertainty in ways that were crafted differently to the shorter statements on the cards. Participants had no difficulty in articulating how they felt about and where they found certainty and uncertainty. What was important for us in this process was the collective acknowledgement and endorsement of the place of uncertainty in our work,





the inseparability of certainty and uncertainty and the way in which this relationship and need for uncertainty ran through the practice of our different participants - in design practice, in writing in fieldwork and in playing institutional roles. Although the statements are differently nuanced and styled, they make the generative aspects of being uncertain, feeling uncertain and moving through uncertainty explicit.

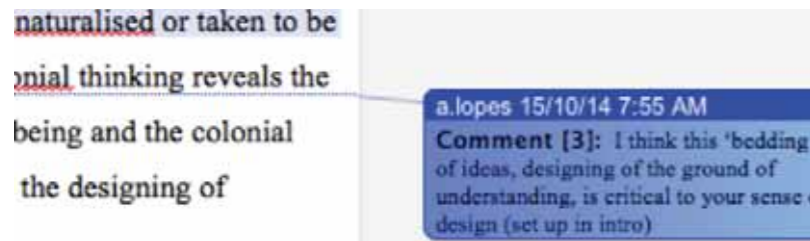
We might well question how, if we are all so agreed on this point if, why it was even necessary to undertake this exercise? We argue that it was, precisely because the theme of uncertainty underpins so much of what we do, but is rarely talked about. Indeed as we are increasingly swallowed up by the risk-averse institutional audit cultures (Strathern 2000), compliance regimes, and the governance of researcher safety and ethical regulation it is all the more important to give a voice to uncertainty, its worth and its generative potential.

The texts fell into three categories: those who could find certainty in their work; those (by far the largest group) for whom the relationship between certainty and uncertainty is integral to their practice, in ways that were expressed explicitly and a smaller number who expressed this less directly; and those for whom uncertainty was called on as necessary for their practice, although not necessarily something that all were privileged enough to be able to play with.



**How I feel certain .... I think?**

In my practice of critical reading I feel a sense of certainty that I will be able to understand the ‘inner logic’ of what the author wants to convey and that I will be able to help the author shape the text in the way they want it to go. Perhaps this is active empathic reading? How I feel this certainty is that it is one of the few tasks I regularly do where I get down to it without much hesitation and have a realistic sense of how long it will take to finish.



In my writing practice I feel a sense of certainty that I’m on the right track when I make a kind of mental connection between something I’ve read and the conceptual thing I’m trying to shape. A resonance? This feels like a rush of excitement in my stomach or burst of energy that is accompanied by a sense of anxiety as I rush to gather up the insight in words. I feel I don’t have to ‘check’ it because I know it is right – it kind of smells or tastes right.

... require an end-of-life plan!!!! This is the blind spot in ...

In my practice of daily food preparation I feel certain my hands will do the work in the right way - follow the right ‘grooves’ - and I can enjoy thinking or chatting about other things. Are these faithful patterns a sort of everyday creativity? **Abby Mellick Lopes**

My practice is driven by process. In this context uncertainty and certainty coexist to create a path through an overarching terrain, but one that has no clear destination at the outset. Certainty is present in the safety of theoretical propositions about place, yet at the same time uncertainty is inescapable in the ongoing, processual nature of the world in which I am

working. This uncertainty is exciting; it is what makes my journey interesting. Yet it is also fraught with questions that arise through the process; where am I going, where will I end up, will the story I have to tell be interesting? Working in this way requires both a suspension of certainty, but at the same time a belief that I will arrive at the destination. Wherever that is. **Alison Barnes**

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A word shower of certainties and uncertainties experienced in my practices of yoga, writing and in the observation of the visual landscape of product promotion and use.

Yoga Practice	Writing Practice
beginning	Opening, a beginning
Observing the breath	Following an idea
Asana or bodily pose	Discomfort: Certainty about limitations of vocabulary – i.e. waiting for words to come.
Flow - following sensation of breath	Hope: Certainty of method – i.e. critical analysis of ‘close reading’ texts
embodied	Discomfort: Certainty about limitations of knowledge – ‘what I need to find out’
discomfort	Wrestle with the tyranny of representation – structure, objectives
tightness	Interpreting the making and doing of others.
pain	Observation of routines and change
Disorientation – going upside down or sideways	Observation of people & things, their interactions within product webs

Certainty: Existing product promotion	Uncertainty: How it could be
Shiny new	Used or resilient
Innovation	Experienced
Untouched	Aged or worn
Affirmative – Like	Challenging or critical
Narratives of desire & purchase	Narratives of use & practice
Individual	Social or collective
Make us buy	Make us think
Own	Skilled or practiced
User-friendly	Care, Share
Convenient	At risk of replacement
Update	Maintain

**Alison Gill**

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‘The trouble with words’, as the playwright Dennis Potter once said ‘is you don’t know whose mouths they’ve been in before’. This is especially true of the words certainty and uncertainty, which seem to have been in many different mouths of late. From TV hosts, politicians and lawmakers to journalists, activists and academics, they are words that move between mouths and are regularly mouthed in public and in private to describe things as vague and varied as citizenship, fashion, art, disease, occupational pensions, the future of antibiotics and availability or otherwise of key ingredients in international cuisine. It seems certain that certainty/ uncertainty are words that do many things and are deployed by people for different aims and intentions that are not

always honourable or commensurable. As concepts they can be confusing, even dangerous, and reveal deep-seated, often irresolvable, tensions when applied in a world of difference and uncertainty. Far from being a neutral or bodiless terms, they are separately spoken in offices but often end up meeting halfway between the trivial and the tragic; between chance and destiny, and between unholy or romantic aspiration. *Andrew Irving*

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I fight for uncertainty. I critique my field for its adherence to progress and codification of everything from emotion to daily life. I am an apologetic squirreler of social theory that allows me to argue that life is fluid, held in myriad balances and ever-becoming. I know the discomfort of edge-walking and not-quite-belonging and I can only guess at the number of frightened spaces across the world in which people are trying to shore up an uncertain existence with things that they can control. Can a measure of chaos be a vaccine so that the big changes we can't handle with our usual strategies, blindnesses and hopes seem a little less startling?

Does this seem the right thing to do? Yes. Do I know? No. I can only ask. My certainties are political, even in my practice: that I should do something to make things better; that I stand on the side of the less dominant; that I explore potential and work to enable it, even if the outcomes are not those I would have chosen; that I keep a place for flux. I think I inherited these certainties from the liberal democratic tradition of European refugee parents. Am I right? Not necessarily. But some things become certainties so that I know what to do when I get out of bed. *Ann Light*

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My first thought is that I don't know/experience EITHER certainty OR uncertainty. My second thought is that I never feel certain, but I need to act with at least temporary certainty in order to make something (anything?) happen. For me, the question of un/certainty is often a matter of choice: I don't

enjoy either when forced on me. I also don't enjoy knowing that one is considered a virtue and one is not (and it doesn't matter which is which). But I think I prefer uncertainty in my practice. I enjoy not knowing what fieldwork will bring, where it will take me. I enjoy learning what I think at any given moment by talking about it or writing it down. I enjoy not knowing what others will think or do with what I've done or made. *Anne Galloway*

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How do I feel certainty and uncertainty in my practice? I am certain that I feel, and will feel, uncertain. Rather than certainty, I aim for momentum. An interview in which my informant is able to reflect at length on my questions is one that I begin to gut-feel will provide valuable empirical material. As soon as they close up I begin to experience creeping doubt as to whether my questions were so clever after all. When an idea I toss into an academic environment via a seminar, paper, or so on is received with enthusiastic discussion I begin to feel I have produced something of value. When the idea hits resistance, doubt begins to form. Smoothness becomes confidence while friction induces fear. So long as my work keeps moving and gathering steam I feel pleased. *Chris Martin*

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Finding a place to start is very important. That, I thought, was a good place to start, but in the gap between one sentence and another, the time of one, the time of the next, well, the word 'stutter' appears. Also, the word 'stammer'. Jumps, breaks, collisions of sound.

Yesterday I found myself writing in a beautifully relaxed two pages by hand but not with words in any language, rather with what felt to my hands reassuringly as if they could be words but without the uncertainties, the gaps, the stuttering of meaning; only the flow of lines. Eventually a few words turned up. I let them in since they didn't seem to mean any harm or mean anything much at all. I needed at that time a small recuperation, a rest from language. I was going to write

something different, something more definitive, summative, formative, conjunctive, (gap, pause), consumptive. Can this be an answer to the question? Do I need to make myself clearer? Do I need to situate and discipline? A shimmer on a powerline coursing across a desert landscape. Clouds, or eagles. Because I'm writing by hand on a page and I'm reaching the bottom of it, it tells me: now's the time to stop.

Ps, miscellaneous: shame, doubt, humiliation, infantile desire  
*David Carlin*

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### *Discomfiture*

Certainty rarely captures the ways I feel about my research practice and I can think of few moments when this word resonates with my professional or personal experiences. When I am working through analyzing material or writing a paper, for example, I might start out with a direction that I think the paper is moving in terms of argument or content, but it often shifts in the process of writing. I find that when I am happy with my ethnographic or other research material, I tend to feel more optimistic about the various forms of writing connected to it. I am closer to certain when I am clear about the people and communities I am writing for, talking with and what it contributes to various debates and conversations. Uncertainty, on the other hand, is a more familiar feeling and one that I embrace in terms of the process of learning and working through new ideas. It's a less comfortable word and way of being when I feel uncertain about how I can find the time and space to engage in research, writing and other ideas. But I'm quite certain I will be experiencing the latter again... *Heather Horst*

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This is a hard question, as if there is a clear line between certainty and uncertainty... Is this like an emotion where multiple feelings can be felt all at once, like one can be exhilarated, scared and exhausted at the same time? Or are



some heightened at certain moments, fleetingly merging into another in an instance?

I embarked on this Design+Ethnography+Futures symposium with a sense of certainty that I wanted to be made uncertain. I wanted to deliberately throw away the certainty of a symposium format, certainty to know what might come out, certainty that everyone will join in, like it, or understand what was happening. Does my removal of certainty automatically become uncertainty? Or is the surrendering to others (conditions, people, events) creates uncertainty?

Where do one stop and the other start? Maybe this question is also to do with how we draw those boundaries ourselves, as opposed to there being one already drawn...

Uncertainty does make one vulnerable, and it makes me appreciate what we have and taken for granted. A spider bit my partner on the weekend. His lymph nodes are inflamed, in pain, shivers and fever and he remains bed-ridden. He is vulnerable. We are uncertain how long his poor condition might continue, or worsen, and this uncertainty makes me feel vulnerable too. But this kind of uncertainty that happened to us feels like a different kind of uncertainty that I am trying to explore in this symposium... I don't even know how to differentiate between the two – perhaps it comes down to choice..? **Yoko Akama**

### **getting to WTF**

There's a moment when things get a little strained. Adrenaline wakes the fluttering bugs down below, eye contact becomes difficult, words fail someone and the pause ... extends. Time to pack up and go home, there's nothing here for you.

That moment is the when the door reveals itself.

Like dreaming that extra room in your childhood home, a door appears in what, moments before, was a solid wall.

Like some piece of science fiction filming trickery, there's now a threshold to knowing in your view.

The door can be ajar, sometimes locked and often jammed. Whatever the state you find it in, finding it is the first challenge. **Jeremy Yuille**

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I feel certainty as a sense of quiet spaciousness. It feels like I've arranged the elements that are of most concern at that moment and I'm exploring them (in relation to each other) to understand the dynamic at play between them. When it's spacious and quiet it feels safe enough to explore uncertainty, ask questions about what I don't understand and am curious about, and take a risk and entertain/explore the unknown. Having enough time to do that in depth (really got lost in the unknown) is pleasurable. This sensation applies across my practice in making, designing, curating and writing.

Sometimes uncertainty can be addictive thrill-seeking and turn into its opposite. If there's a processual link it can mean for me that it's not a new thrill-seeking tangent but a deepening understanding of something I've thought about over time. This matters in the fields of art and design because sometimes design is predisposed to focus small and tight on the immediate now with a very limited sense of time, longevity, history and context. **Katherine Moline**

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I'm realising that I have a deep unease about the binary between certainty and uncertainty broadly, and in relation to my practice. I've become more interested in contemplating my practise rather than my practice - the verbs rather than the nouns. And perhaps in thinking about certainty or it's almost absence (uncertainty) I find myself caught in a similar tangle. Is being in a state of (un)certainty like the state between practice and practise - a state of being, or a state of becoming or transitioning. I can't find a means to be still in either - like the evolving nature of practise, so too are the

manoeuvres in certainty. I probably find it easier to embrace knowing and unknowing, assurance or relinquishment than the confidence of (un)certainty. Always a shift, a drift between the two- a move towards one state calls for the other. The more assured the phenomenon, the more the unknown becomes prevalent. With age comes the loss of the assured faux confidence of youth. At the completion of the project it is not what is known that takes front position, rather it is what is still unknown or to be discovered.

Ease, like the subtle flex in cloth that you need as you stitch it into a form, this is the state that I most desire in the practise of my practice. **Laurene Vaughan**

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When I was a young PhD student I often heard from senior faculty professors that what I did was possibly interesting but for sure: it was not really sociology. Obviously, this made me feel quite uncertain about what I was actually doing. At the same time I got excited! Many years later I can recall that feeling of balancing between certainty and uncertainty and it is still somewhat of a productive challenge for me. I guess my formal training as a sociologist makes my research qualify as sociological but I often end up having a feeling of being outside the disciplinary boundaries. This feeling, I guess, is very much part of me, over and over again, becoming a sociologist from the outside, so to speak. I challenge myself and my assumptions by leaving what is recognised as sociologically valid or reasonable in order to be able to return to the comfortable sense of being certain by having been uncertain. This would mean that a certain amount of uncertainty becomes part of or perhaps even forms the very basis for my sense of certainty. **Martin Berg**

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There is a constant combination of feelings of certainty and uncertainty in my practice at the charity shop. Certainty comes from the fixed days I'm scheduled to work, the people that come and work those days too and the roles and routines we practice.



I feel certain  
when / about

... Process →



Uncertainty comes in the material we work with. Donations, although these can be grouped in already defined/certain types: clothing, toys, bric-a-brac, media (books, cds, dvds) Jewellery, furniture, electrics...the stories of those things, their donors, their condition, value, future owners/destiny is uncertain.

This combination of certain activities with uncertain material determines the unpredictable interactions of the day. From these encounters when rotating stuff into other cycles unexpected conversations, feelings and connections (...) take place during/in the transformation of value and in the sharing of time, knowledge, skills, anecdotes and in the physical engagement during the movements of the place.

**Melisa Duque**

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This issue is already ambiguous for me. By invoking feeling, it converges the potential (and probably practiced) contradictions, paradoxes and confluences of 'practice', whatever the spatial or temporal dynamic of that is (without being banal about the everyday, but I thrive, professionally on these margins of practice as social). Nevertheless, I am 'uncertain' about which 'practice' I should be focused on: being an academic, being artistic, being an improviser, being anthropological, being a dad... in such terms, we can be certain about being uncertain. This all resonates with an 'openness' I espouse in practice that can sublimate (hold and break) the contradictions and tensions of knowing and not knowing (about certainty/uncertainty). If there is an undercurrent that apprehends creative power in practice as social, then openness as process is an embracing of doubt as means to anticipate hurdles that we can approach with spontaneity – and improvise. **James Oliver**

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I feel uncertainty and certainty as good and bad and as something I want to avoid and something I want to create.

Certainty feels restraining and limiting when imposed by the research/ university institution through economisation models and cultures of surveillance and control. Certainty of the act of doing research. The need to represent and be represented. Uncertainty in this sense is good and feels good but is hard to achieve. Design research needs to be institutional critique in order to be research embedded in uncertainty. How can we call this un/ certainty? Structural or Institutional? Ideological or cultural? Un/certainty by design

Such uncertainty can be only achieved through collaboration- partners in conversation and thought, partners in shared struggles. Such collaboration then also creates certainty. Personal certainty. Autonomous zones.

Research feels certain when I fall in love with it. Certainty of doing what I love. Intimate certainty, radical intimacy.

**Oliver Vodeb**

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With respect to my practice – the truth of which is not at all certain, bound up as it is with academic aspirations and mundane institutional realities – certainty is not a good sign. In many ways, it's an indication that I'm following a path I've followed too many times before, that I'm not challenging myself, that I'm not learning anything, and that I will soon be bored. Uncertainty is that result of venturing into new areas in search of something different.

There is an openness to this uncertainty but a precarity too. Since much of my practice revolves around the mentoring and guidance of graduate students and junior scholars, I recognize too that it is a position of privilege to take on this precarity. I can allow my disciplinary position to be uncertain, open, and ambiguous in ways that my students cannot. We may be eager to embrace uncertainty but this is not an ability that is evenly distributed in the world.

**Paul Dourish**

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I am always most comfortable in my practice as a design researcher when there is an uncertainty in the making. This conformability does not come from being a high-risk taking person, but from making efforts to be well prepared. If design research like design might be thought of as trail-blazing, as exploring through collaborative experiments, then the capability of living with and embracing uncertainty is at the core of such practices. Such uncertain practices do not have certain given goals, but there is certainly a strong sense of directionality, even if there may be detours and even change of routes as we travel along. **Pelle Ehn**

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When my practice works at its best there is a positive feedback loop between certainties and uncertainties. Patterned and planned parts of my workflow feed into serendipitous parts where the unexpected can occur and then become evaluated and turned into provisional certainties. I try to be open to glitches and anomalies and I try to be able to transmute noise into meaning... Yes, I try. I also want to turn meaning or multiple meanings into overlapping patterns of noise, where the irregular, the blurry and the fragmented might become epistemological assets. At the end however, there is only the provisional. **Robert Willim**

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I feel certainty or uncertainty when I write a text, be it a speech or a text to be published, according to the feel I have about the focus, concentration and directions of the argument or plotline that is in the making while I write it. What I am actually making is a "You", the Universal You, who can be anyone – within or outside my discipline or the academia, sitting in the audience in an academic or non-academic occasion when I deliver the speech in the future, or reading it on her/his own. It is I who has the responsibility that the text makes sense for all even if different people get different layers out of it.

Certainty follows a feeling of enjoying the thinking process and the finalizing process and the idea that a "people fabric"

is interviewed into the text (as all knowledge is produced collectively, not by individual authors I need to cite people across various divisions) but also into the implied readership that I assume will understand and/or learn something from my text. So, I am making lived moments of the future. Uncertainty follows from not being able to do and free the previous. **Soile Veijola**

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My practice is multi-dimensional - it is my disciplinary training (as an anthropologist), it is my work (as an Assoc. Prof, a researcher, an administrator, a collaborator, a writer), it is my leisure practice (aikido training and teaching, travel...), it is my social interactions with my son, my friends, my colleagues, my social network online.... Hence, certainly and uncertainty flit in and out and through all these rich, intersecting and embodied practices. To think now about how they are felt.... hmmm.... they are felt in moments. I feel that my anthropological field research in its most creative and liberating capacity has always for me emerged out of the moments of the unexpected - the disjunctures between what people say and what they enact or do. I feel my practice in the workplace is most certain when I can smile - when the uncertainties of higher education and fraught tensions between institutional structures and between individuals are approached in a state of mindful awareness of the present. I practice mindfulness through sitting and through my practice of aikido in my "leisure" time, but that "leisure" does work for me - it provides me with a feeling deep in the belly - a momentary reprieve from the past and future oriented worries of the practice worlds I manage as I move through life....**Tamara Kohn**

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The practice of ethnography is for me a continuous engagement with uncertainty. The creation of a feeling of certainty is the illusion I have to perform for my potential financiers.

It is the act of putting into an application a clear methodology and explanation of not only what I am going to do...but often even presumptions about what I might expect to find. This is the certainty that such grant foundations as the Swedish Research Council or Riksbankens jubileumsfond are looking for. Thus certainty is the illusion/lie I deliver to them. It is the magical act of conjuring, an incantation that I have to say over and over again in order to convince those who might allow me to begin my practice.

As soon as I move into the field, or begin asking questions, gathering materials to help find answers to questions, I find myself literally moving through fields and landscapes of uncertainty. The answers I come to are contingent and temporary. They are partial, as are the ideas that begin to take order on paper. Uncertainty is the practice I struggle to teach my students, the act of not being so sure they see the whole answer. And in this sense, uncertainty is the cultural process of my academic production. **Tom O'Dell**

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### ***About writing practices***

In this statement I have chosen to focus on the specific part of the writing process where the actual individual typing is taking place. Certainty and uncertainty when writing in this phase is for me an embodied and emplaced experience. Both these sensations are needed and both are created through the lack or availability of the right or wrong elements in my physical environment in relation to what I am writing. I have noticed that as soon as I get stuck in uncertainty of what to write I just move in a circle in the place I am in, crossing my arms in front of me and look into something else than the computer screen (preferably a window). My arms and fingers need to embrace myself more than the computers keyboard. Interestingly enough, after a while I feel certain again of how to continue writing. At the same time when I am in need of some creative space and want to invoke a feeling of uncertainty I do this maneuver once again but with another purpose. Usually, in this reversed process I need to move out

of the room I am in when writing. I have no idea why. Maybe I should try to find that out. Or maybe it is best to keep this as an verbal uncertainty in order to keep the sensation alive.

**Vaike Fors**



### **Shared uncertainty as a door to collaboration?**

Uncertainty emerged through this first morning of activity then as an opportunity, a need, a way of working and as being in dialogue with forms of certainty. Our discussions also situate uncertainty as something that goes beyond being a technique or element of research, design or intervention. Rather acknowledging uncertainty entails a critique, it is anti-institutional, radical, risky, generative, it is operated from a position of confidence and privilege (by those who can afford to be uncertain, or by those who cannot but will take the risk anyway). It is however more often than not with ways of feeling comfortable, sure and certain.



Uncertainty is our bedrock, it is where our practice is grounded, it is even part of the feeling that makes us certain that our work is on track. But at the same time it often remains hidden until we are sure enough to reveal it.

Uncertainty ran through disciplinary difference, and offered a way of thinking across practice. This does not deny the differences between disciplines, and as we show next, going beyond one's disciplinary familiarities with certainty and uncertainty are sometimes more complicated. Yet having put and acknowledged uncertainty at the core of our discussions and our practice, we have created a starting point for thinking about how to work together through practice, using these common ways of sensing and knowing in our practice as potential starting points. However, as a precursor to the next section - where we engage with an activity that invited participants to engage with uncertainty - here we complicate the question of shared notions of uncertainty. To do this we interrogate the question of where uncertainty can or might productively reside in our practice, and what the consequences may be when it resides differently for practitioners with different orientations. When we invited participants to talk directly to camera, reflecting on what they had written on their cards, a new element was introduced. As we have noted a series of common themes emerged that told us that for participants whose practice is in-between disciplines, un/certainty can reside in movement, goes beyond being a binary and has questionable temporality. Yet this still left open possibilities for participants to experience uncertainty at certain and often different moments in their practice. We will let a set of participants describe this themselves as they explain their approaches on video. In the next section we explain how these issues became more closely defined.

When we invited participants to talk directly to camera, reflecting on what they had written on their cards, a new element was introduced. As we have noted a series of common themes emerged...





*Soile Veijola*



*Laurene Vaughan*



*Tammy Kohn*



*Melisa Duque*



*Pelle Ehn*



*Jeremy Yuille*



*Robert Willim*



*Ann Light*



*Tom O'Dell*





3

## Lunch

Participants were divided into two groups – those who were asked to make lunch and those who were asked to undertake an impromptu documentation of the process of making lunch. The group of (food) makers were given a variety of fresh ingredients which had been purchased earlier from a nearby market to work with. The brief asked the participants to create dishes according to colour groups within an hour.



“We could do something with the cheese  
– maybe mash it up even more”

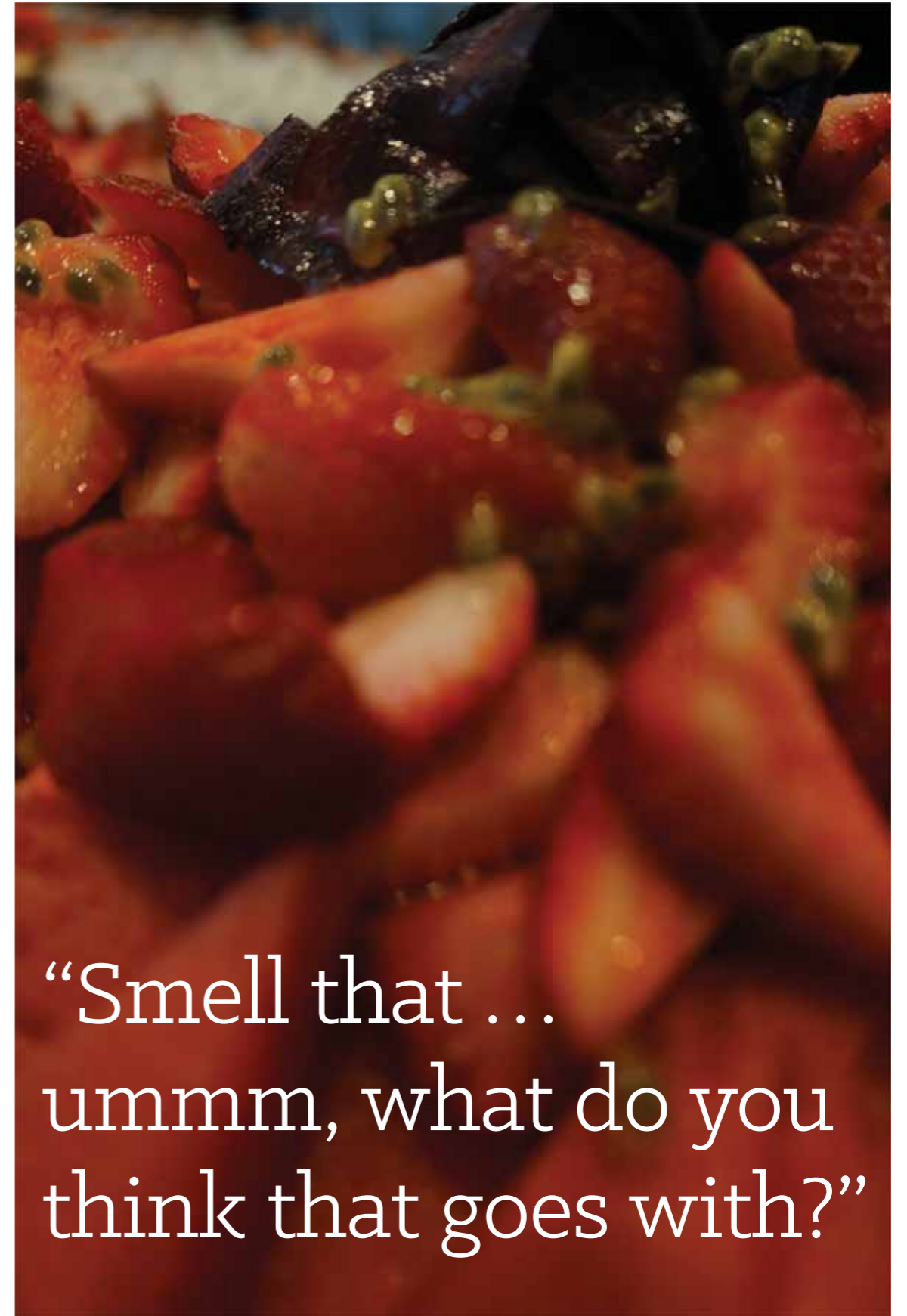


This lunchtime activity had been intended to create a situation of uncertainty - that of not knowing what would be made, what we would eat, or what we might learn from this activity. We also intended to throw the observers into a situation whereby they were to research, as best they could, a spontaneous event about which they had no prior knowledge. Instead of being theoretical with our notions of uncertainty, this session immersed us in it - makers, observers and facilitators and all - to see what we can discover when we experience it viscerally together.

As the images and excerpts attest, everyone showed willingness and commitment to step into this uncertain exercise, motivated partly by the fact that this was their only way to eat. The groupings of makers and documenters might appear as blunt distinctions between design and ethnography, but given that some participants already blended the two approaches, and many were not trained in either of these disciplines, such distinction seemed to matter little.

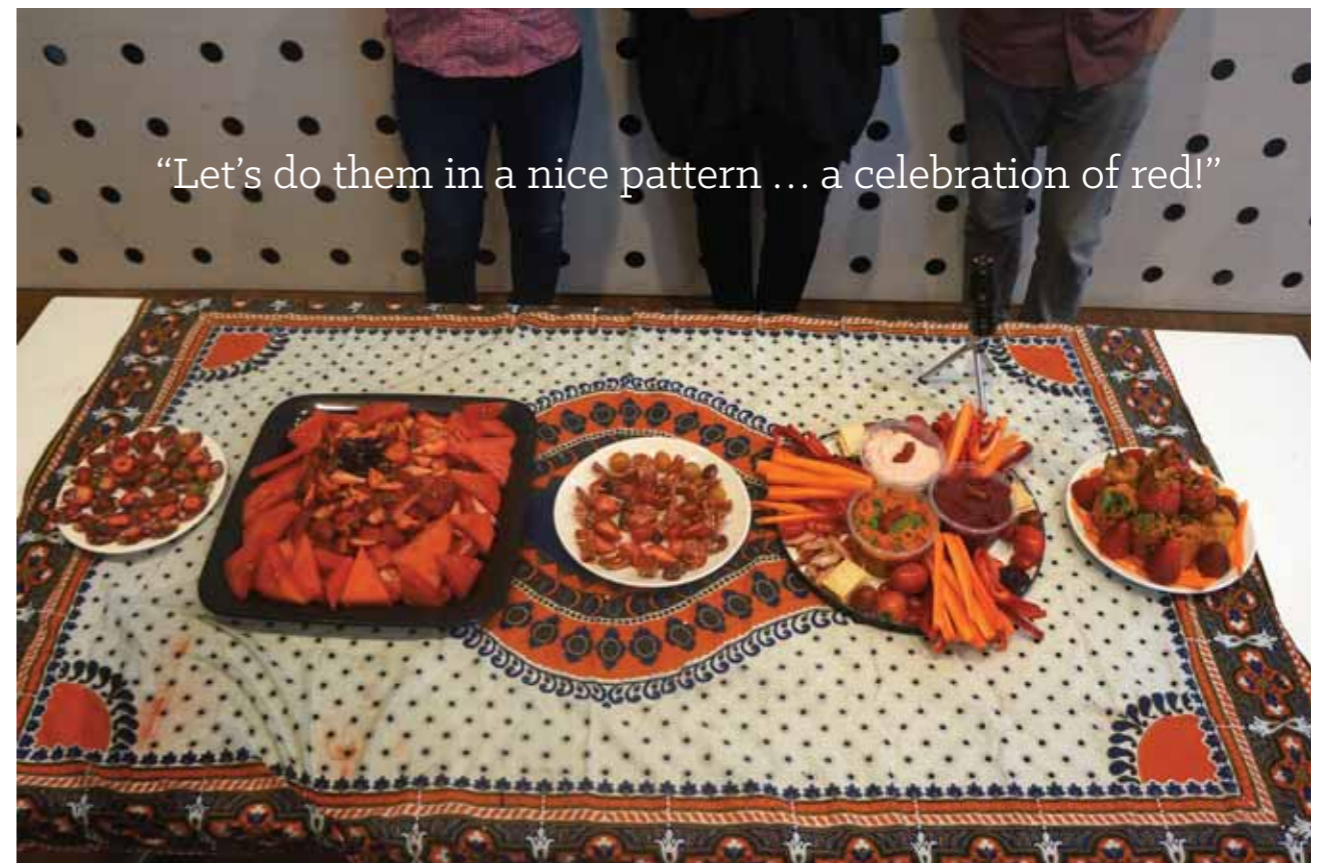
“What is it?  
It might give us a  
tummy ache”





“Smell that ...  
ummm, what do you  
think that goes with?”





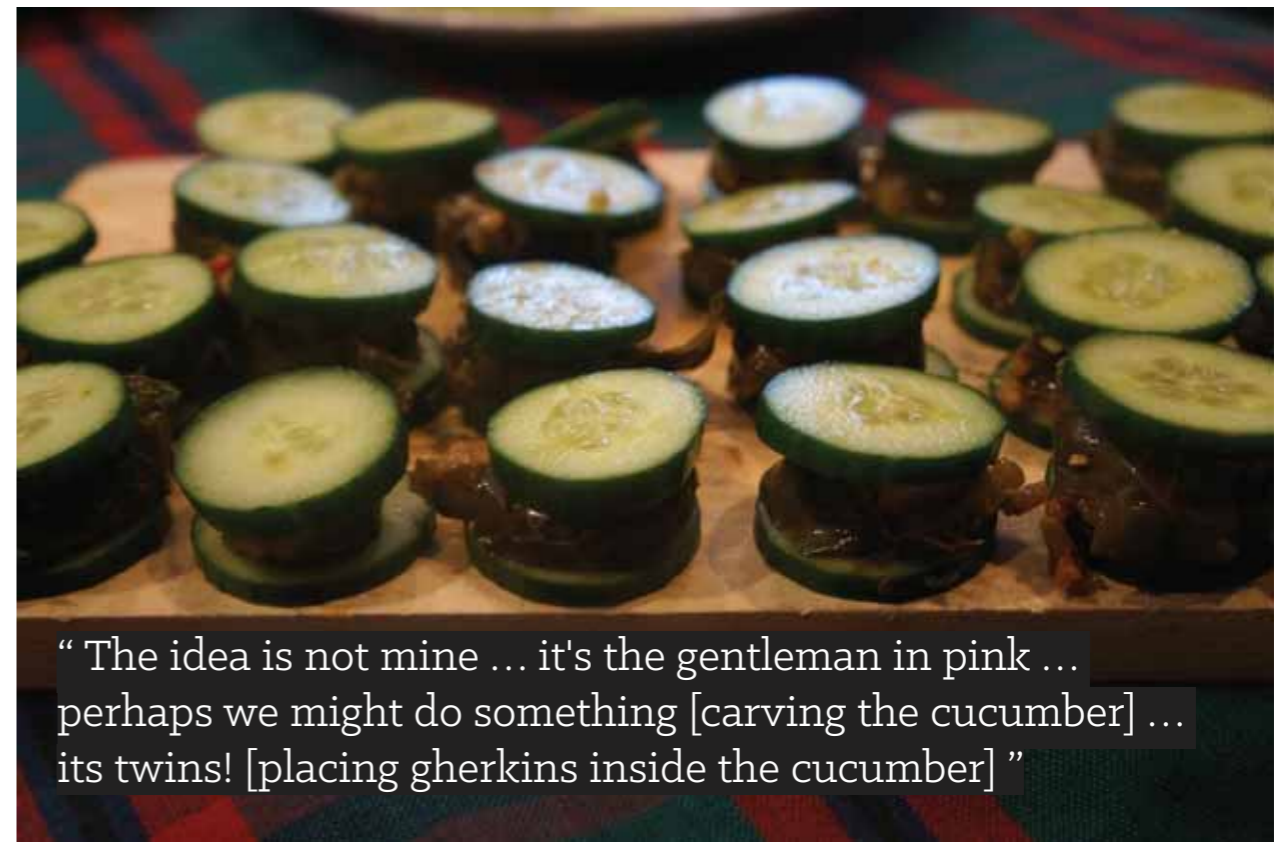




“ This is a feast of red ... we just re-assembled this group. We had to make a rationale of why colours..., which you may initially feel are out of place, are indeed part of the spectrum. As you know colour is entirely culturally relative, and so we’re seeing it through many different eyes, and for those of us who have a certainty that this is a red table, and others who don’t, we can negotiate that over the eating. We also challenged the classifications of savory and sweet but we hope it gives you all great pleasure.”



“[tasting] This is quite lovely, have you tried it?”



“ The idea is not mine ... it's the gentleman in pink ... perhaps we might do something [carving the cucumber] ... its twins! [placing gherkins inside the cucumber] ”





“We worked with ... inside and outside and thought very much about covering stuff. We actually made four dishes, one is, the ‘shies-and rocket mousse’ it was supposed to cover the crackers completely... through an elaborate technique that we came up with.... We are also playing with the orient vs the American and the cucumberish world. This is the green table. Because we are very passionate so we have a passion-guacamole, which resembles how we feel about this fantastic exercise.”









“ This was a team that was assembled around something brownish-yellowish, ... that’s how we came together. I think there was a clear idea that we wanted to do some cooking and to stretch, a bit, beyond where we felt comfortable with cooking. We went with the meat and the strawberries and the cheese. The real interesting thing in terms of the theme of the symposium was when we decided to do meat and cheese, and we saw this wonderful stove out there ... So we prepared and came out, yes, it is a wonderful stove but there are no pans! So in the very making, we had to re-invent and someone was brave enough to use the microwave ... its up to you to judge how well it worked but that’s how we solved it for the moment. ...Enjoy! ”





Here, we sensed a commitment to uncertainty as the makers explored in various ways; through tasting unusual ingredients, by combining them in experimental ways; by trusting the hunch of their fellow team members; by inventing techniques of cooking and preparing. In groups, some delegated tasks, some inspired others with ideas, and some improvised together in an evolving process. Teams worked quickly and productively within tight time constraints, even though many did not know one another.

Many observers were also experimenting through photography, film, and audio, frequently asking questions, sampling the dishes, following the maker's movements, and attuning to the sensual process of making. Some even began following and participating in the observer's interactions. What started with a clear demarcation between the makers and observers began to merge as the exercise continued, where both groups were responding and engaging with one another in an emergent food experience.

The accounts generated within this hour were varied and plentiful, reflecting their collective efforts in pursuing the trajectory of the brief. The outcome was an amazing feast of colours, textures, smells and taste. Lunch was ingested and enjoyed thoroughly by all.

### Post-lunch reflection

This lunchtime exercise imbued characteristics of different disciplinary orientation, whether that was in design, ethnography, art, theatre or film-making, where emergent, exploratory and immersive experiences led to a collaborative making of sensually delightful meals. However, once we sat down for a post-lunch discussion, it shifted away from practice into a theory-led debate. The very attempt to put aside disciplinary points of definition in fact brought them to the fore through a discussion of the principles of anthropological ethnographic practice. This discussion was led mainly by researchers who are engaged through an anthropological interpretation of ethnographic practice. Anthropologists and ethnographers noted that they were uncertain about the process of documenting the lunch making process and found the exercise problematic and contrary to some of the principles of





ethnography. This led to further discussions from the anthropologists of what good ethnography should mean, that it should be systematic and more embedded, not just fluttering around the edges, taking a second guess as to what to record. The almost 'hit and run' nature of the lunch time documentation ventured too far for some for whom ethnographic practice requires more immersion, incremental ways of learning and knowing about others and understandings that are rooted in closer relationships and self-reflexive interrogations. This separation of anthropology alone may suggest more about the speakers than the field itself. Yet, perhaps this is inescapable because we are ourselves so defined through our engagement with our disciplines, which is not only an intellectual engagement but something much more embodied and (as the points developed below also suggest) identity constituting.

To make sense of this, there are a few things we need to bring into the discussion which we speculate as possible explanations, and which also might be seen as an example of why holding on happens, and letting go is difficult. Firstly, the discussion of anthropological ethnography may have been triggered by the speed, chaos and underprepared way participants were asked to observe the lunch-making experience. There have already been discussions about how anthropological ethnography is distinguished, and we do not want to repeat those debates here, since our objective is to depart from them. However as a reminder of the types of sentiments they raise, for example, Jamer Hunter suggests how such tasks have been perceived in anthropology;

'Most anthropologists would not consider one week of videotaping subjects brushing their teeth to be an 'ethnography', just as they did not spend six to ten years studying Durkheim, Mead, and Foucault with an eye toward convincing uppermiddle class new parents to switch diaper brands. In some ways, this confluence of corporate strategy and ethnographic processes is a shotgun marriage between an emergent industry need and a glut of social science doctoral graduates who have been facing a withering academic job market for over a decade' (Hunt 2010: 34).

For some anthropologists uncertainty is not dependent on the creation of an experimental scenario in which we don't know what people will do and wish to document the ways in which they improvise. Instead improvisation lies in the context of the research encounter, the not knowing what will happen next and the possibility of experiencing this through one's immersion in the environment in which an as yet unknown future act or other 'thing' might emerge. Anthropological ethnography should be able to, precisely because they have learned through immersion, explain and understand post-hoc the unexpected thing that has happened. Or it might be that the unexpected occurrence is itself what enables the ethnographer to explain everything else that has happened. If we pitch our short term lunch-time task against this explanation of anthropological ethnography as a necessarily longer term activity, then it is easy to see how this could be problematic for some.

Although there are many ways to be an anthropologist - such as those outlined by the more radical manifesto of the EASA Future Anthropologies network formed in 2014, online at <http://futureanthropologies.net/2014/10/17/our-manifesto/>.

When we compare anthropological approaches to design research for example, great similarity exists on learning through doing. Designing an artefact often involves serendipity, emergence, frustrations and unexpected discoveries – things that were never planned but encountered through designing (Storni, 2012). Intuition and improvisations are a major part of a designer's trade (Goodman et al 2011) and by extension, their dexterity in turning chance into an opportunity. In other words, designing by its nature has a great deal to do with being ready to act within an unknown, and for Schön, design 'hinges on the experience of surprise' (1983, 56). Designing, which most often takes place with or among people like commissioning clients or potential users, also brings to bear many dimensions as part of contingency. Workshops, which are a central feature in many co-design, participatory design and service design processes, involve heterogeneity of materials, people and systems. This view of design sees 'socio-material collectives of

humans and non-humans' that are assembled through 'matters of concern' (Bannon & Ehn 2013, 57). The 'co' in co-designing is a signal to 'embrace the influence, interventions, disruptions, tensions and uncertainties brought to bear by other things and people' (Akama and Prendiville 2013, 32), even when incremental details of transformation are 'hidden' by their very nature of being silent, internal, layered, ephemeral, dispersed, all of which are difficult to capture and articulate (Akama 2014). For design researchers who are often involved in assisting with the process of change, they acknowledge that projects are messy and unpredictable, often requiring agile, collaborative, systemic interventions with stakeholders (Akama and Light 2012). Designing in this space reveals the high degree of arbitrariness and emotions that shape the trajectory and outcome, and personal relations are strongly influential (Light and Akama 2012). In these contexts where pressures of time and constraints of projects are the norm, commitments are made to the participants involved in the process of change, and purity of method is one of the first things to be abandoned (Light 2010).

Seen this way, there are more commonalities between design and contemporary ideas of ethnography in approach, engagement and ways of knowing and unknowing, than differences that separates the two disciplines. This indicates that, although the confluence of design and ethnography had been our departure point of this event, by the very nature of the participants' diverse practices that traversed through multiple disciplines, including art, fashion, theatre, creative writing, music, film-making, poetry, visual communication, computer sciences, education, archaeology and more, made the disciplinary question more troubling. None of the participants were there to uphold 'purity'. Indeed, as discussed above, the preceding lunch-making exercise manifested no obvious, visible disciplinary boundaries. We observed making, moving, talking, cooking, listening, tasting and watching being disassembled and re-assembled by people, objects, ingredients and intentions where boundaries were less visible, or often willingly challenged.

As we worked through the materials from the first day, one of the puzzling findings was that while the initial activities - the postcards, texts and videos - seemed to indicate that certainty and uncertainty were integral to the practice of all researchers, the post-lunch discussion revealed less agreement. Here the demands of a discipline, specifically in anthropology, were made acute; on one hand to embrace uncertainty by learning from not knowing what will happen or what people will do, and on the other, a corresponding need to be able to do this within a sufficiently deeply engaged research process, systematic enough to be able to cover and uncover the patterns of activity and feeling that emerge from human activities. This suggests an oscillation between certainty and uncertainty that generates a propulsion, manifesting as a movement, where we, as researchers, traverse through and among various encounters.

The observation from the post-lunch discussion raises some points that we invite the readers to consider. Firstly, if we embrace uncertainty and see it as part of a feeling that makes us certain about our research, what forms and states of uncertainty are generative, and what kinds of conditions enable uncertainty that is valuable? Secondly, how do we strategise un-disciplinary practices – in other words, not being afraid of 'impurity' and celebrate ways to be 'epistemologically filthy' (EASA Future Anthropologies network 2014) in order to pursue uncertainty? What attitudes and commitment do we need to let go of knowledge and disciplinary positionings, to willingly be open to the possibilities of where uncertainty could take us?







4

## Constellations

In comparison to Day 1 where exercises were highly structured, Day 2 became one that was characterised by open, fluid, serendipitous and participant-led activities. In part, this was a way for us, the facilitators, to 'let go' of our agendas in uncertainty or Design +Ethnography+Futures, and to see how a day might unfold when groups nominate who, what and where they wanted to explore.

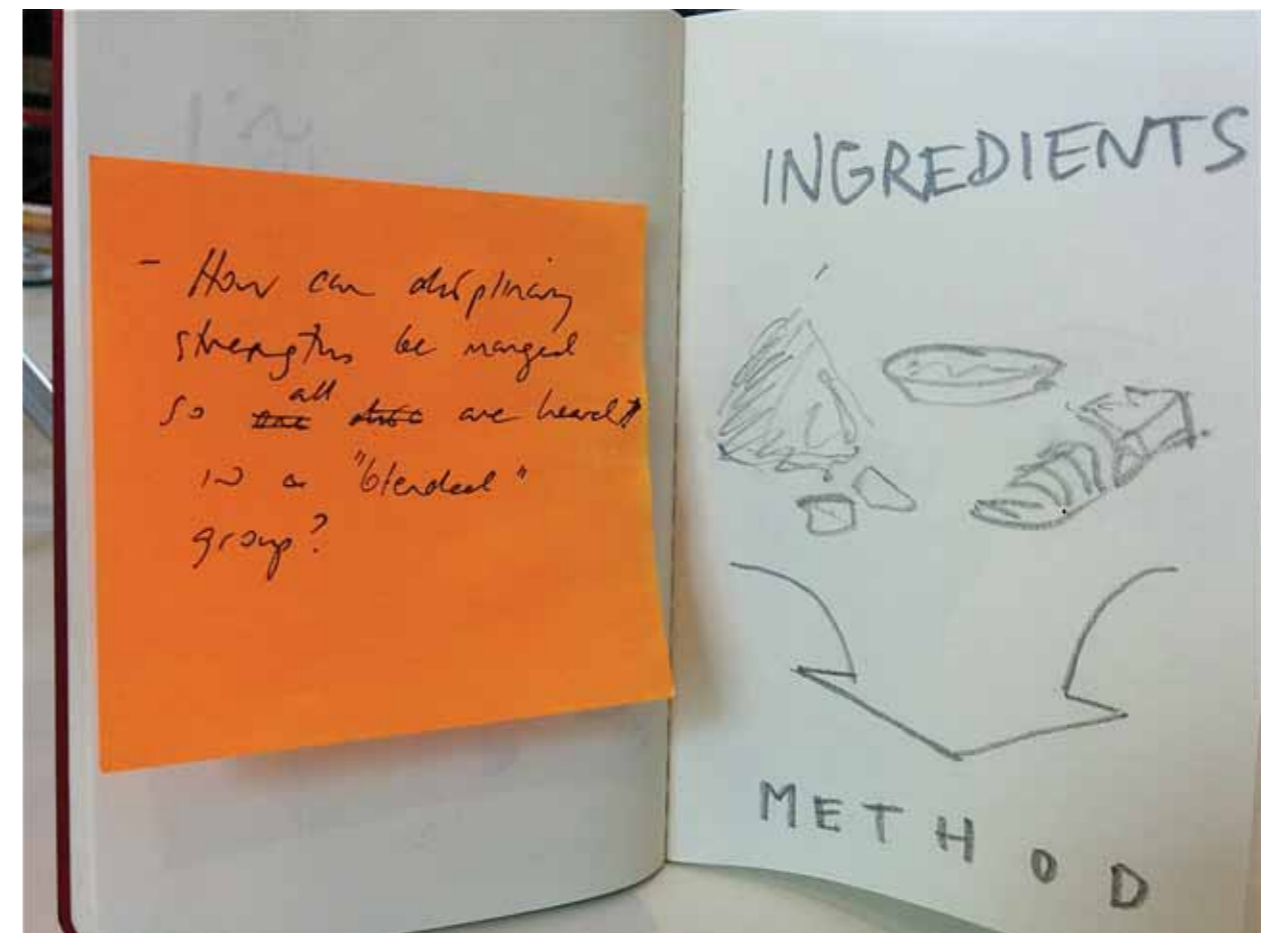


In preparation for Day 2 activities, we generated a set of shared principles that the group collectively agreed would usefully serve as a framework for thinking and practicing during the activities. These principles were not intended to be definitive in any way but instead to be a set of particular principles that would work for our specific collectivity. That is not to say that these are unusual principles, but that they reflected the commitments and questions inspired by our discussions, and connected back to the themes and issues raised in the book of evocations that all of our participants contributed to before the symposium.

The following themes were generated in groups, and participants self-organised themselves to visit cafes, bookshops, the markets or just amble the streets of Melbourne.

- Empathy: alarm / other (which opened up the possibility for empathy to go beyond its usual role in generating wished for understandings of other people's experiences, towards being the more uncomfortable form of 'alarming empathy')
- Privilege + uncertainty (who can afford to be uncertain and to value uncertainty? - is it our privilege as researchers that allows us to play with such concepts while for others for whom uncertainty about some of the things we might assume as basic to our lives is ongoing it is not a desired)
- Temporality / unmaking (which reminded us to think and practice in ways that go beyond linear temporalities and disregard our assumptions about what comes first and what later)

The five constellations below traced the collective themes in general, and some used it as a starting point to depart from. The images, video, writings captured here evoke their ways of collaborating, inspired by the environment as well as one another. They suggest movements towards letting go of their disciplines, being deliberative in their strategies to meet mutually somewhere in the middle to see what their encounter may bring.



Jeremy Yuille

*James Oliver, Nikos Papastergiadis, Tamara Kohn, Melisa Duque,  
Andrew Irving*

### **Para ambulation**

We should start with the middle: the point at the cafe at which we started to reflect on our journey from the Design Hub [at RMIT University] to Manchester Lane [in the city]. And Tamara wanted to reverse the perspective from looking out from our bodies to the environment to being seen, felt and experienced within a total environment. So the seeing and sensory experience wasn't emanating from a singular point in our body but was part of a distributed network that included multiple cameras, the conversations overheard by others, the sense of being seen and judged by others, the reflections in mirrors and glass windows and so forth. So from this dispersed perspective we came to thinking of an ambient perspective and that one's empathy with the environment didn't only emanate from our capacity to extend or project our feelings towards others or be with others but rather this





rather more nebulous and wider sense of being attuned with the whole of that environment.

What is - we must ask - the constitution and character of an environment when we incorporate into the environment, fully, that time and space. A two meter square cafe table around which five people are gathered, opens up a window far and wide that within a single minute went from the notion of 1.8 miles in the Hebrides in 1978 to Roland Barthes being run over by a bread van in 1980, to a person plunging into a cesspit of shit in 1990. It was almost as if the mind could not but make sense of this. What might it mean to do an ethnography that also encapsulates the way that thought, conversation and dialogue range freely across time and space of 1850s Melbourne to a future tragedy that is not yet known. *As a coda: [for this para...] a discussion concerning the empathetic relationship that exists between persons who have worn the same set of clothes, i.e. the clothes wearer and the original clothes from an op-shop as mediated through the bodily traces left around armpits and collars, and why is it that this form of empathy is alarming?*

So nostalgia and reverie are brought to mind within the temporality of these sited and unsighted spaces. We encounter these 'para' spaces as functional and ambient, giving each of us new meanings as we maintain our mobility together. Whether we are making or unmaking our own histories or the histories of other peoples and places, empathy both wells up and transcends, and is enfolded back within the uncertainty of being in place. So, when we privilege nostalgia and reverie as site or temporality, we should embrace the uncertainty that an ambient ethnography presents for our future negotiations.

Let us end this first iteration of a para-ambulation with the beginning and the end of the exercise. We all set out from RMIT clutching our audio recorders as we embarked on a journey that for some was exceptionally familiar but made different by the act of recording, but for others was the first close encounter with this street scape. For some eyes darted along, eyes encountered other eyes and observed the architectural details of this somewhat chaotic urban

landscape. Others allowed themselves to get lost in their thoughts, which allowed associations only triggered through senses of sun on skin, smell of fumes and eucalyptus, food smells triggering imagined and remembered tastes. We converged at the table and we marvelled at the way in which our various experiences through the streets cohered. Then back to RMIT along the elaborately tiled laneways guided by Nikos' local knowledge, and back to the Pavilion, anticipating a shared moment in the future when we will transcribe our monologic and conversational reflections.

~ *ambling on/ James Oliver*

December 11th, 2015: the second day began slowly. People drifted in, with intentions to drift out again onto the streets. The previous day, on December 10th, we had our shared beginnings, having gathered together in our general assembly. This second day, we split into cells and collaborated: sub-groupings and social formations. Our group formed, not around a practice per se but in a poetics of emplacement. Andrew, James and Nikos were revisiting cultural sites, scenes and Manchester. They shared reflections on their situated memories and experiences of place, talking through reimagined experiences across a durational space-time of the 1980s-90s. Nostalgia? Cultural Critique? Tamara joined in. Melisa joined. The group was convened. The larger room then reconvened, and James and Tamara juggled and debated an anthropologist, his text, articulating an inspiration for his *antropoesia/ anthropoetry* (Rosaldo 2014). The book was passed around, literally; quizzical speculation proceeded, the proposition was on creative spatial simultaneity and multiplicity, and inversions of 'here in there,' of 'now in then.' Our *anthropoetry* group re-oriented outwards to *drift* the city and improvise a shared, durational creative practice.

If the city is a laboratory, everything can happen: past and future *present*. It is 'parafunctional space'. *'What the term parafunctional seeks to expose is the constant and unpredictable dialectic between place and practice,'* (Papastergiadis 2010: 112). We sought rapprochement of memories and places

by redesigning our shared space through a collective practice of reimagining our 'sensory emplacement' (Pink 2015). From our shared point of location in Melbourne our strategy was to create a series of paths and traces through the city, and all meet up again for coffee in Manchester Lane. The exact tactics for this were up to us each to improvise, but as a creative device we spoke aloud and recorded our voices (Andrew provided the digital recorders) to articulate our senses and memories, as we stepped through our negotiations of the grammar of space in the city (De Certeau 1984). The city becomes a parafunctional space for a series of stories and cultural memories that cohere for us, to explore tensions in the 'distribution of the sensible' (visible/invisible, audible/inaudible, sayable/unsayable) (Ranciere 2004); but also in an enquiry between the forgotten and the not yet remembered, the imagined and not yet imagined (cf. Calvino 1978, Lefebvre 1968). We reconvened and spoke our words to each other, completing sentences with each other, connecting ideas and creative prose through collective voice - generating another parafunctional space and emplacement.

On return to the general assembly we offered our improvised spoken words, now scripted onto paper, to be rearticulated aloud, further cohering our shared imaginings from collective to individual, in an iterative creative loop. Co-creative, ambient, inductive, ethnographic: para-ambulation.

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*David Carlin, Ann Light, Soile Veijola*

## **COMPANION PIECES #1: Walking to the market**

### *1 (Soile)*

Mobile neighboring captures various social formations, situations and spatio-temporal arrangements for one to experience an unknown city, and evokes the ethics and ontologies of being-with-while-moving-and-neighboring at the same time. Walking on the streets in-three provides us with a mobile configuration that affords both talking-in-three, seeing and discussing the same “thing” (be it an object or a topic) while moving on through the changing landscape.

It consists of a balance of leading and following, being led and being followed – which would not be possible in groupings that are either smaller (in-two



one often leads the other) or bigger (too many interests colliding so one leader is necessary). It would be especially difficult in guided tourist walks, predesigned in time and space as a social practice that revolves around sights to be seen and photographed, and to be seen beside of, and photographed.

Yet a potentiality of a radical tourist ethnography emerged through our one-and-half-hour long walk to and through the Victoria Market Place in Melbourne: loitering through the visual sights, tastes, smells, and chats with the vendors, for instance in the department of organic food and that of “Australiana”: “the thinginess of Australiana” made for the tourists.

Our walk-in-three was composed of a mobilized conversation and tactile experiencing of a place centered on the co-presence of people (a market place), rather than on monuments and remarkable examples of wau-architecture.

Again, I remember that I am a street-level person, not a roof-top viewer or one who wants to admire high edifices.

Thereby a walk-in-three affords empathy towards everyone’s needs, priorities, photo snapping and topics of conversation, as well as respect and attention for the items that are put on sale and that thereby ultimately produce the social institution people recognize from all around the world as “the market place”. We did not cause alarm, resentment, or prejudice as a pack of people, as one of ten or twenty persons might do.

We were in other words privileged by the sheer size of our group. Three makes up a perfect panel. A just jury to assemble. The third is the one whose vote decides, and ends any dispute. Yet the outcome of our “judgement-in-the-making” remained uncertain; we were, after all, not led by a single motif, person or goal.

Our unmaking of other grand motives but being-three (if the working on the notion of Anarchist Designographies is not taken into account) created a

temporality that allowed us to mobilize and spatialize, with trust and confidence, the time frame, city-frame, and social frame of our being-with-one-another-in-three.

Through the shared undeciding and undesigning of our journey, we visited a place, a social world and a social institution in Melbourne – and each other’s words and worlds.

## 2 (Ann)

a) I was one. Then I was a third. I was suddenly accountable to these others. And without clock or phone.

Then I was following a local (an adopted local) and we left down the stairwell, me running down the long corridor before them, late; my thoughts scattered by the morning’s other agendas.

And the journey to the market is lost, so I will begin with the smell of it... some spice, some more mundane groceries. Cameras come out and the observations replace the chat: kangaroo meat advertised on a stall sign; David snapping Soile snapping the stall signs and me commenting on his commentary.

We comment on the merit of three, on our relief as we pass by fruit and veg at quite a speed. We rejoice that no one is lagging... we are not behaving like a bad tour group. We have discussed and dismissed tourist groups that are being led. Following around... In the way... Ridiculous to others... Do they care that they have all turned their head to the right like synchronised swimmers?

Here, there is no overview. ‘I get the underview’, I say and quite like it (I am very short). Soile is not much taller than me, but David soars.

I spot my colleague Yoko but she doesn’t spot me. I see Christmas cakes and puddings, but very little of the fuss that Christmas at home demands. (I



normally celebrate Christmas in the northern hemisphere.) The Christmas shed is mostly remarkable for its good dried fruit.

b) The café is an unintuitive place. We pick it reluctantly because it is in front of us and just by the market. The space is perfect for writing our report for the workshop, the woman serving helpful in identifying the gluten-free 'small things to go with coffee', the apricot and fig loaf is a thick slab, lightly toasted so warm, served with butter. The sweetness of the apricots and crunch of the figs making it a good starting point for settling in to this. We explore how we formed: we return to the number 3. We don't review the prejudices that made us uncertain about the café, David calling it 'a bit lo-fi' and me not at all sure it would be able to supply Soile and me with gf food. I lash butter and note my hasty judgment. I am with charming people, I think.

### 3 (*David*)

Walking through a door I would never usually walk through: a café but nothing cool or hip or Melbourne about it.

Sitting in a red vinyl booth by a window, as if we could be in America in some nameless town.

This three of us.

We walked slowly, as it turned out. We had a plan to visit three places and we had a theory, a rationale for each. First: the market, place of commerce and chaotic urban life. Second: the domed reading room of the State Library, place of ordered, structured, catalogued learning. Stacked underground vaults of knowledge and an airy cupola longing to be in London or Florence. Third: a ruin, a non-place, a site for Soile's anarchist designography, a movement against neo-liberal development mechanics.

We've only made it to the first, the market, and now this café. The market is very familiar to me but I watch it now through the eyes of the visitors, my two companions Ann and Soile. I feel myself abandoning myself within the security of our spontaneously kindled sociality. At the beginning they are strangers.

We wander among the stalls. We all take out our smart phones. I am torn between taking photographs of what I notice, taking meta-photographs of my companions taking photographs, taking videos – of everything? Will I ever look at them? I develop no system of recording, except that every now and then something compels/draws/invites a photograph. 'Can I borrow that photograph?' asks Ann, by which she means: can I take the same photograph you've just taken? (a photograph of 'Discount Clothes for your Dog', which are modeled in a rack not on mannequins but on stuffed toy dogs).

We have agreed that three is a very good number for an uncertain action of companionship. Two is only a pair, back and forth, to and fro, intense and unrelenting. Four would have a tendency to break apart into two pairs. With three you are small enough not to lose each other, to move and to converse.

We stopped and drank chocolate port that a stallholder offered us as a gift. Further on, we accepted another gift: natural dried fruit. Dried nectarines 'from just up the road', the man said, and laughed. (Mildura, 300 kms away.)

Finland, I have learned, is the shape of a woman. Soile can show us whereabouts on her own body she has lived – here for some years, near the sternum; there, where she was born, on this side of the waist. For farthest Lapland she has to raise her hand above her head (sitting in the booth of the accidental café).

A lot can happen in an hour or two, as Ann said at the beginning. What happens afterwards, what remains, of such a quietly intense experience?



*David Carlin*



*Soile Veijola*



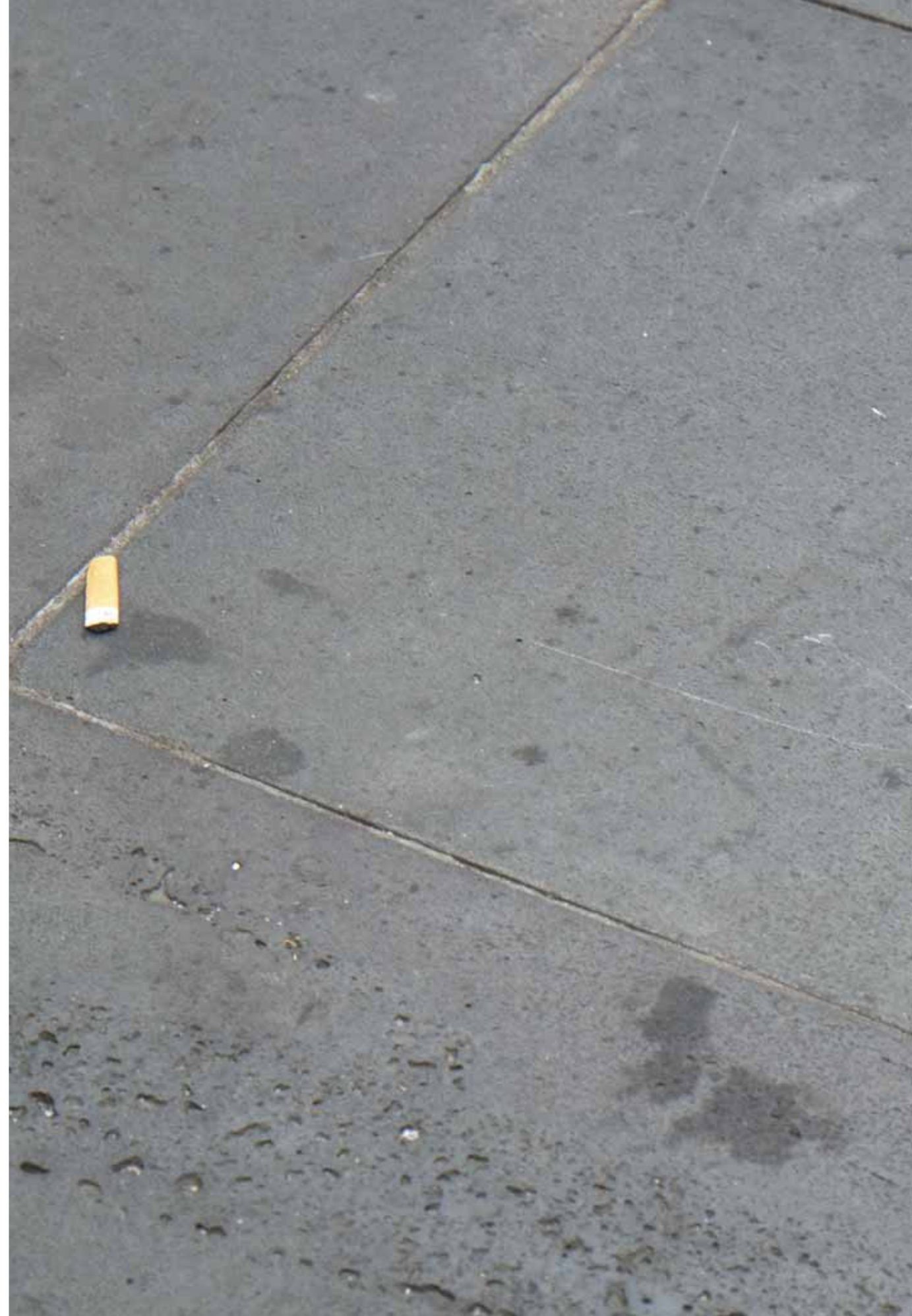
*Ann Light*



*Abby Mellick Lopes, Alison Barnes, Oliver Vodeb, Katherine Moline,  
Yoko Akama, Jeremy Yuille*

### **An uncertain walk**

The walking group came together through a simple invitation to walk within a marked boundary, drawn by Abbey Lopez and Alison Barnes. The boundary encircled the Queen Victoria Market in Melbourne, which was an intended destination for lunch the previous day (but it was closed). Without any definite plans other than walking and immersing ourselves in this encounter and experience, six people gathered – Katherine Moline, Oliver Vodeb, Jeremy Yuille, Abbey Lopez, Alison Barnes and Yoko Akama. We walked, sometimes together, and sometimes alone. The themes of empathy, privilege, temporality and uncertainty surfaced in the periphery of our conversations, thoughts and image-making. Traces of these are captured in the following pages.







Dialogue = good for getting into a state of empathy



noticing people don't use phones in the market



Observation: walking at someone else's pace: different temporality







The object is never just for-itself but is a fulcrum or lever across which the force of creation moves back onto the human site and remakes the makers - Scarry



Wanting to feel empathy becomes a difficult question. I don't want to be a tourist.



Empathy can only be spontaneous





*Sarah Pink, Vaike Fors, Martin Berg*

### **Automation in the Wild: exploring empathy**

In 2015 automation is one of the key themes that we will be researching with other colleagues from the Swedish Centre for Applied Cultural Analysis - Tom O'Dell, Robert Willim, Heather Horst and Chris Martin, working across Halmstad and Lund Universities in Sweden and RMIT University in Australia. In this piece of research and writing we wanted to explore the theme of automation through the prism of Design+Ethnography+Futures, developing a way of doing ethnography, thinking through ethnography and presenting our work that is related to design in a number of ways and is indeed not as separate from design, but blended with its techniques, practice and its orientation towards futures, while also maintaining a critical perspective on the notion of future-making that is rooted in the social sciences and humanities.





To explore automation we developed a small project that we have named 'automation in the wild' - again we wanted to borrow a concept from outside conventional practice in the social sciences. While the 'in the wild' concept originates from cognitive anthropology, rather than engaging with the anthropological debates around it, here, our interest in it is in relation to how it has impacted on design research. Hutchins' *Cognition in the Wild* (1996) (many thanks here to Jeremy Yuille for clarifying the origin) is presented as 'an unusual interdisciplinary approach to cognition in culturally constituted activities outside the laboratory—'in the wild' (see <http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/cognition-wild>). However we borrowed the concept of in the wild from HCI discussions, although even in that field it seems not entirely clear what is meant by it, as Chamberlain et al (2012) (see <http://www.cs.nott.ac.uk/~axc/work/DIS2012W.pdf>) have explained:

Currently the concept of in the wild research is unclear and it is also not clear how the methods that many designers use to develop systems can be applied in real world contexts, away from the design lab. A central part of designing in the wild is evaluating prototypes as they are really used and integrated within people's lives. This involves observing and recording what people do and how this changes over suitable periods of time (2012:795).

For us as ethnographers by experience and training we were not particularly concerned about the challenges of how to go out into a real world context because this is what we are already accustomed to do, but we were interested in seeing how a real world context could become for us a world of prototypes and probes. That is, how by approaching the world differently we might learn and generate ways of knowing in new ways. For us this was also a way to think about how to fuse or blend approaches and ideas from design and ethnography, and indeed is a way to introduce the notion of the 'lab' into ethnographic practice, but envisioning the city as an 'urban lab'.

Once out in the city, by focusing on how automation might be in the wild we were interested how and where we might encounter automation in the city - where it would surprise us, foil our aspirations, where we could play with it, trick it and how we would see others engage with it. In the end in fact it was not only automation itself that surprised us but what we were able to do and how we were able to 'think through' the instances of it that we encountered. These emergent forms of knowing about not only automation in the city but also about what we were performing as researchers were integral to the experience of encounter as in the following extract from the audio recording of our excursion:

Sarah: "We're starting to use the city and what people are doing in it as a probe to enable us to speculate ... because one thing I thought we were doing, there's this kind of go out and observe what is around you which is a traditional sociological thing, where you might not actually speak to people, and I started to think that that might be what we were doing, but we are actually not, we're actually using them in a different way. Its a very non-participatory way of doing research, but actually its because we've turned them into a probe which enables us to think beyond what is actually happening, and that's really interesting in terms of methodology."

Vaike: "It reminds me my association was directly to Matrix, .. when one of the guys working in the resistance .. he was called something like Mouse ... its a story about this is not the real world, this is just a [computed] matrix that we experience because we don't know anything else, and then one person person gets the opportunity to see what the real world is really like and then a computer takes over and there is a resistance working and this guy, he is actually sort of providing things into the matrix and can create things and he is guiding this guy around in the matrix, and I got that feeling you know, its like people don't see us, and we use them as probes."

In what follows we outline what we learned by developing an ethnographic exploration of automation in the wild/in a small part of the city of Melbourne.



Figure 1: Our experiences of automation began in the building. We experienced elements of both actively calling the lift and depending on the ways in which it would automatically respond.

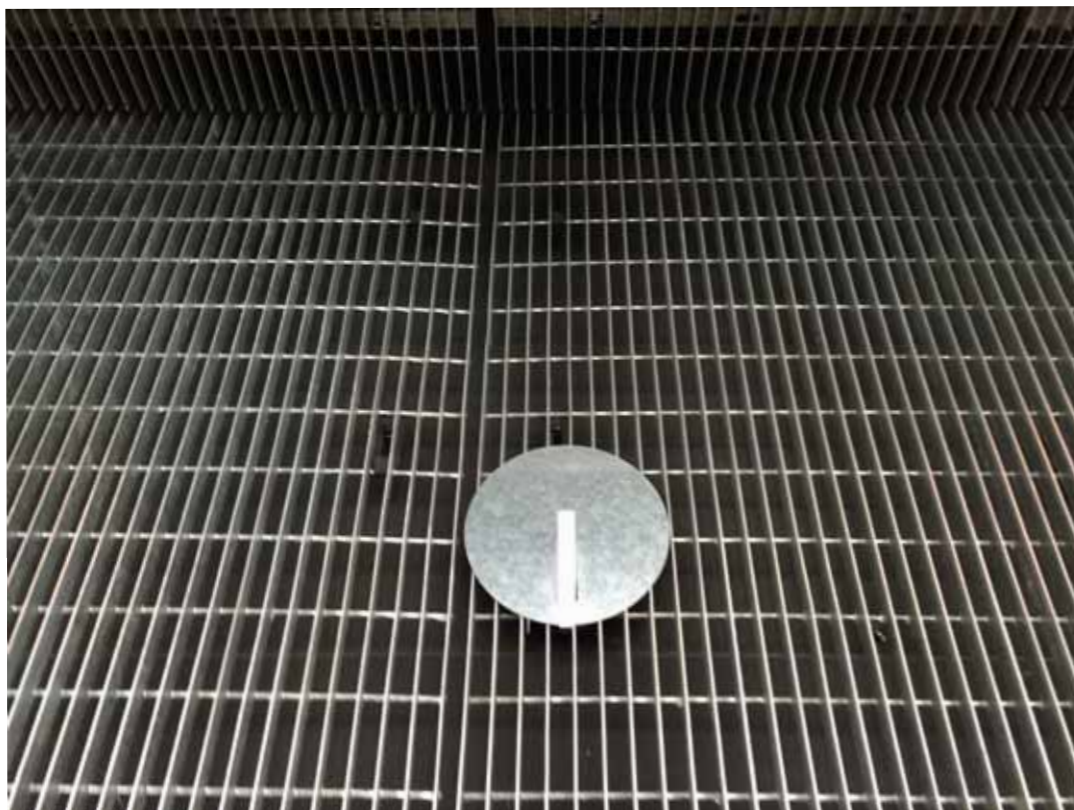


Figure 2: the lift lights played a part in this automated process, telling us the lift had arrived.

Moving forward by a form of research practice that was not habitual to us and that had surprising consequences, we set out to explore automation through the Design Hub where we started, and into the neighbouring streets of the city, along Victoria Street to Victoria Market, which we moved through before returning to the Hub. We brought with us two wearable cameras that automatically captured a photo every 30 seconds. These cameras added another experience to our excursion, a sense of being automatically monitored while we were investigating where automated technologies exist and how they work. It also had an impact on how Vaike and Martin moved through the city. If you wanted to capture something you had to stay with it for at least 30 seconds. We also used other techniques; Sarah used her iPhone to audio record our conversations as we discussed what we were learning and experiencing, and to video and photograph technologies that we experienced.

Below, in the spirit of the symposium and the task, we discuss, not simply what we did, but rather focus on what we found out; that is one of the three themes that were collectively identified during the earlier session to explore how concepts and experiences of empathy, and privilege and temporality were revealed, challenged, shifted, or clarified through our research process. In this essay we focus in on empathy using it to explore how we sensed and experienced automation, although as we show it in fact took us beyond empathy.

Empathy, a concept that it is likewise difficult to define, has been used as a way to discuss how ethnographers learn from/about others and their experiences, how they might communicate their experiences to co-researchers and how experiential research findings might be communicated to both academic and non-academic stakeholder audiences (see Pink 2015 for a discussion of this in relation to sensory ethnography research). In this activity we used our interest in automated technologies as a way to explore how we might use empathetic ways of researching and engaging with other people and their experiences in relation to automated technologies. We were also seeking



ways to think about awkward, uncomfortable or difficult forms of empathy, which had been discussed in the previous session of the symposium.

### *The relationship between empathetic and technological ways of sensing and monitoring*

Through exploring automated technologies and playing with them we started to ask questions about how to think about sensor and monitoring technologies in relation to human sensing/monitoring/knowing. We became fascinated by



how bodies moved in relation to automated technologies, by touching, or almost touching them. Vaike reached out to the automated door as she went through it, but people also hear, look at and sense automated doors in other ways.

We began to think of this as a form of human sensing and monitoring, working in relation to the automated sensing and monitoring technologies that we encountered. Another example was found in crossing the road, where it was necessary to navigate, sense and monitor a range of human and

automated technologies, traffic lights, cars, drivers, pedestrians and more. We offer the transcription and Martin's lifelogging photos to show how our understanding emerged from this conversation:



Figure 3: At a big crossroads, we contemplated whether to cross the road or wait

Martin: "its not sort of adapting to our pace"

Then the task of crossing the road itself, started to become a research probe, inspiring new ideas about the automated city

Sarah: "The way we are walking through the city shows it is not designed to make our experiences as comfortable as they could be, so if we think of this as an ethnography of automation in the city we can ... we can think about it as an ecology of automation and ask how all the different stakeholders creating

forms of automation are not connected up at all, and the ways that trams are automated is really frustrating in relation to traffic lights.”

Martin: “We could think of how all these different automation processes compete against each other.”

Sarah: “Yes they do.”

Martin: “If they’re not synchronised then they are competing, because they don’t sense us, and they don’t ask us, they just sort of guide us through.”

Sarah: “So as a person in a driverless car, which becomes part of that automated ecology, there would be loads of things that would frustrate you.”

Martin: “Oh yeah, because you would also take time to see what was going on, you would not know what was automated, you would not understand that.”

Sarah: “There are things I get cross about about the trams and traffic lights, the tram stops at the traffic lights but I have to cross a different road before I can get to the tram and the tram will leave before the lights change so I can’t get with it”

We met Vaike again

Vaike: “And when I took the chance of running at the end of the line, I realised how many things I had to watch, because I had to watch the other traffic lights because they were turning green, I had to watch the other pedestrians, I had to watch the traffic lights I was ... steering towards, and I had to watch the trams, there were just so many things.”

Martin: “So suddenly you were the kind of automated person, ... you could not rely on anything, you had to control it”

Vaike: “I had to control it, I couldn’t control it I had to monitor it.”

Martin: “You couldn’t rely on anything else.”

Using the city in this way as a probe enabled us to start to think about the ecology of automated technologies: there are multiple forms of automated technologies in Melbourne, which seem to be owned or controlled by different stakeholders who are not necessarily synchronized and this shapes our experience of the city and the ways in which we are able to experience forms of certainty or uncertainty in relation to the technologies that we encounter

***How do our empathetic capacities as researchers enable us to engage with these questions about how (other) people engage with technologies?***

One of the first activities we engaged in was in the Design Hub, we ‘played’ with the automated doors, and observed others move through them as discussed above. However because we wanted to go beyond conventional ethnography and beyond observation we explored the set of doors that temporarily would not open. We walked down waiting to see if people would (as we had in the past) walk up to the doors and try to enter. In doing so we were already empathetically anticipating their experiences, we realised that this form of empathetic anticipation can be applied to people we are expecting to do things, even when they never arrive, as happened with the door. Yet as a probe the door invited us to speculate about how a closed automated door which would not open would be experienced and led us to think in new ways about our own experiences of this.

Another method of understanding how other people experience automation involved seeking to empathise with their emplacement in the world. For example:

After telling us about how she had crossed the road, Vaike told us how her way of moving had shifted into a different form of knowing and empathetic monitoring:

Vaike: “It was a monitoring experience, moving through there... and then I moved and I did what they suggested, ... I walked together with a person and



that was quite interesting to move behind them .. I just fell into something, I fell into a pace, and I was looking what he was looking at.”

Sarah: “And did you feel that was empathetic.”

Vaike: “Yes.”

### **Conclusion**

This very process of seeking to understand not just our own but others’ actual or imaginary experience of automation also left us with a challenge and question, again drawing from the themes that emerged from our symposium: Is there a privilege in being able to think we have some agency or forms of contestation against automation? There is definitely a privilege in being able, as we were to go out and play with automated technologies in the city, to speculate and imagine through them and comment on them as we have.

Yet further to this, there is another and perhaps more pertinent question for how we might consider the development of a Design+Ethnography+Futures approach - that is a blended approach - to automation in the city: How is it within this ecology of automated technologies that we found in Melbourne that relations of power are played out - what politics and economics of everyday life are implicated in the ways in which different people engage with different forms of automation?

As we have pointed out, there are multiple forms of automated technologies in Melbourne, which seem to be owned or controlled by different stakeholders. These are not necessarily synchronized and this shapes our experience of the city and the ways in which we are able to experience forms of certainty or uncertainty in relation to the technologies that we encounter. Yet this will not play out in the same way for differently situated people, we need to be aware of the variety of ways in which such relationships to automation will be experienced, and the implications of this.

This is also something that we argue that a design+ethnography approach in dialogue with disciplinary theory can contribute to our understanding of how automation is played out in ‘the wild’. Understanding how the social, political and material relations of automation are part of urban life, how people navigate them, and how the experience of urban automation might be re-worked through co-design to shift the inequalities represented in these relations, is one way in which as Design+Ethnography+Futures approach might be guided into a more equitable and sustainable world.

*Annie Fergusson & Chris Martin*

### **Uncertain Encounters with Automation in the Wild**

Automation, what is it? Is it about handing over agency? Someone else driving? How does it feel to interact with something that is automated? How does it feel to hand over control? How much of our world is automated? As we pondered these questions we watched people approaching an automated entryway that didn't work. It appears that an automated door that doesn't work is, in fact, worse than no door at all, leading to unfulfilled expectations and unexpected inconveniences. Work without doing is, in theory, going to make for lighter progress on the path of life or in the pursuit of bigger aims.

When this work-without-doing works, the effort becomes invisible. But how does it taste when the door doesn't open. Taste the tasteless. And that small act of walking through a door becomes a big rerouting of your path. Magnify



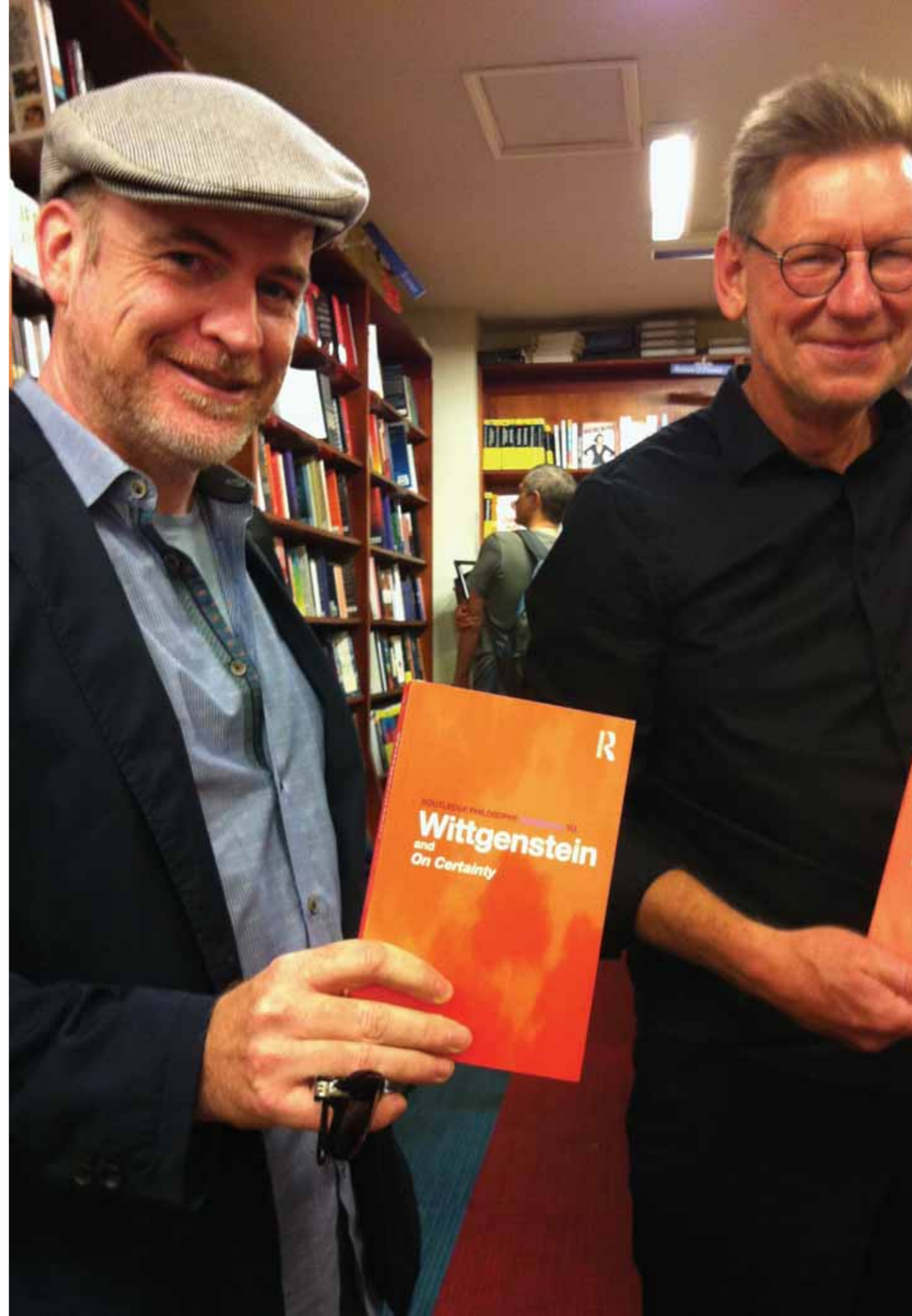


the small. And those few seconds that you were late for the bus turn into the late bus home. Increase the few. Is automation in the wild a more savage beast than that door-programmer realised?

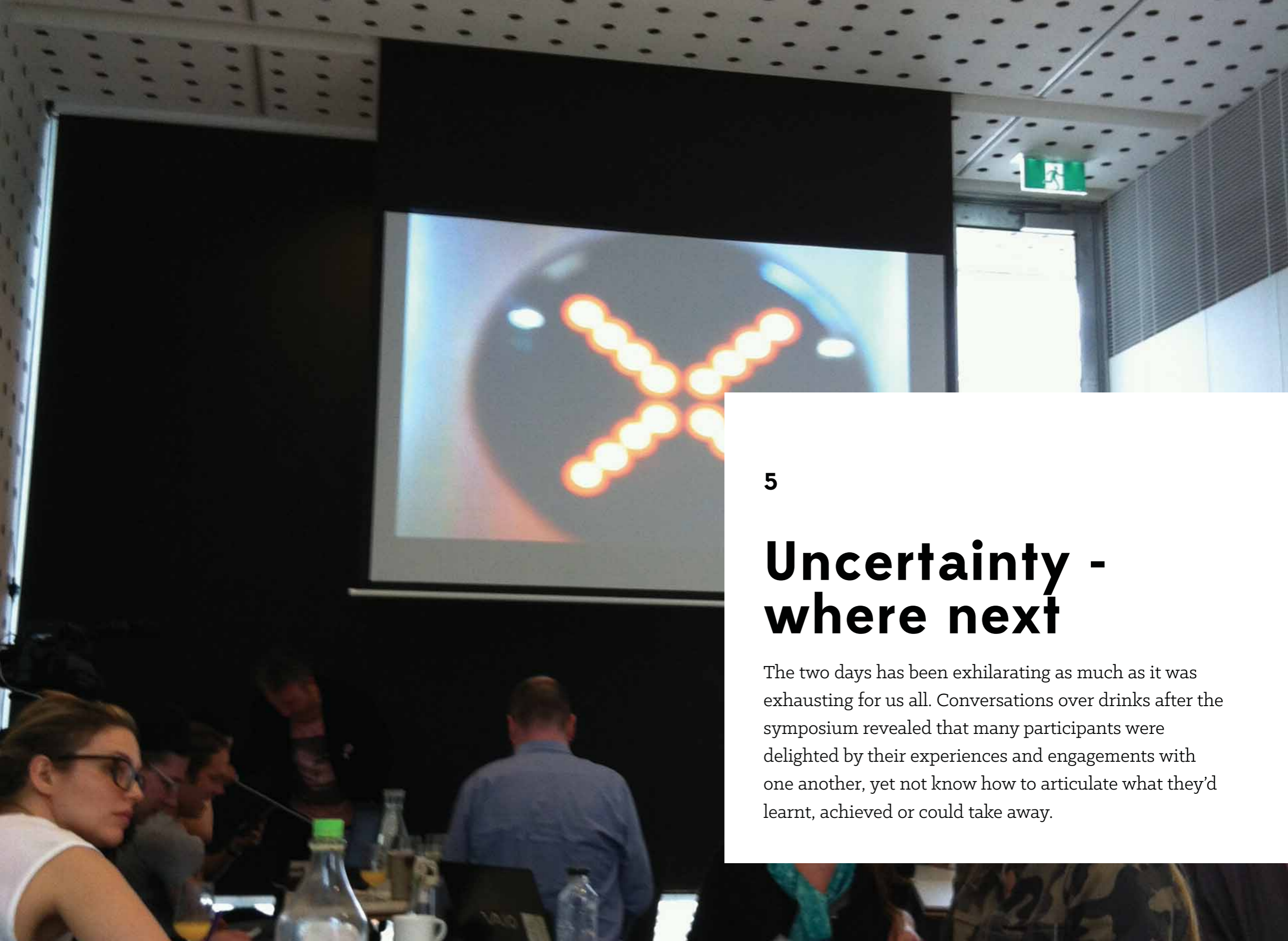


*Pelle Ehn, Paul Dourish, Anne Galloway, Tom O'Dell, Robert Willim,  
Sarah Kushinsky, Anna Farago*

**Uncertainty**







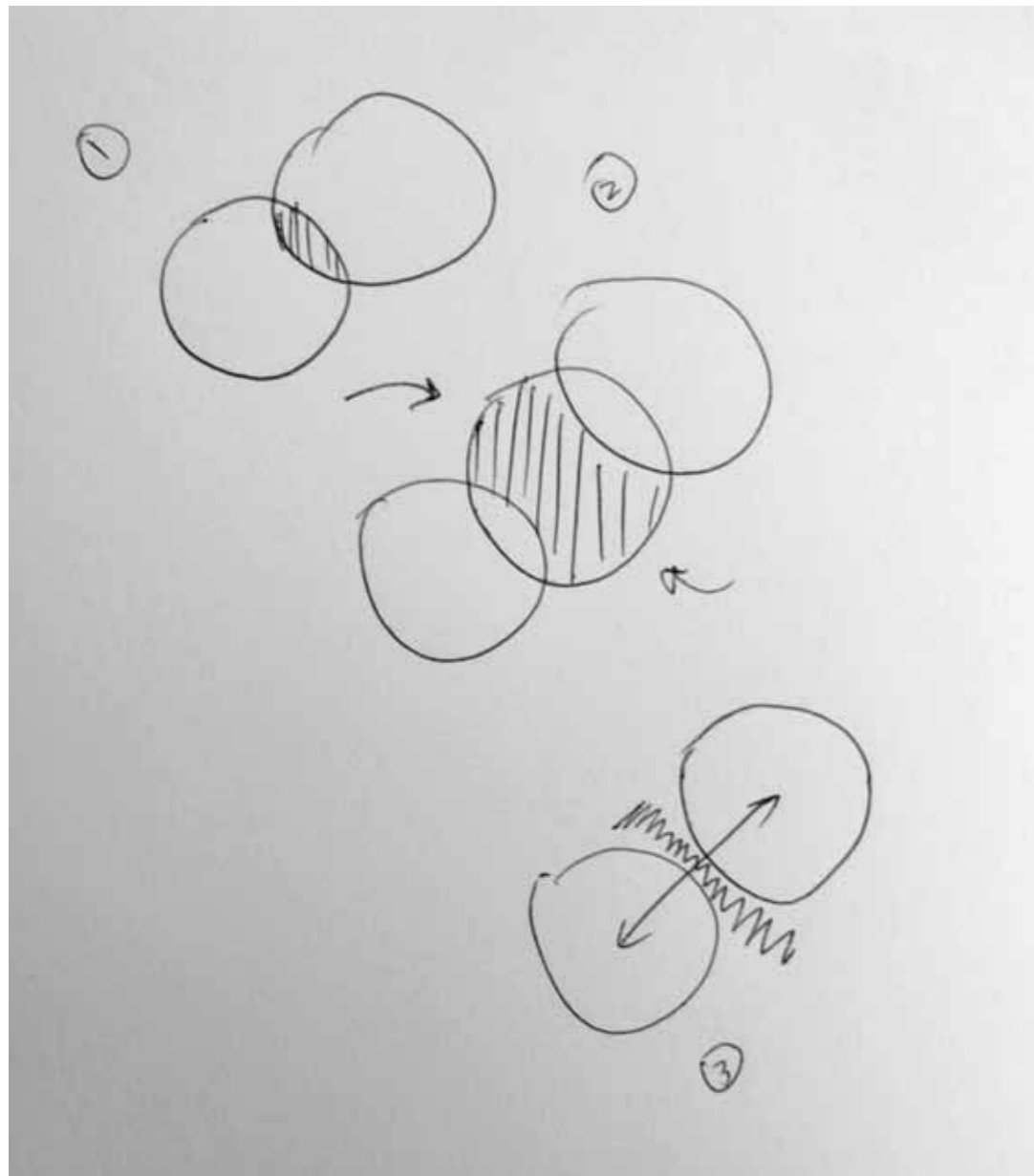
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## Uncertainty - where next

The two days has been exhilarating as much as it was exhausting for us all. Conversations over drinks after the symposium revealed that many participants were delighted by their experiences and engagements with one another, yet not know how to articulate what they'd learnt, achieved or could take away.

Their lack of resolution and the way they had opened up avenues for exploration and further questioning suggests the generative quality of uncertainty.

For us as authors and instigators of this event, we are hoping to invite some of the participants and others who were unable to attend to contribute to an edited book on 'Un/certainty', to ensure we continue our discussions and what we have begun. Alongside this activity, for Design+Ethnography+Futures programme, there are specific questions we are hoping to pursue:



Yoko Akama

1. If Design+Ethnography+Futures became a blended discipline, what aspects do we retain, remove or modify from its respective separate origins? What kinds of practices, concepts or processes might characterise this combined discipline? What kinds of outcomes and knowledge could this generate?
2. If Design+Ethnography+Futures became a 'third' discipline, almost as a bridge between the two, again, what aspects do we retain, remove or modify from design and ethnography? What other aspects does it need to incorporate from other fields of knowledge? What kinds of practices could this be 'third' one become?
3. If Design and Ethnography are separately embodied in practitioners (eg. ethnographers and designers), where might we find their meeting point and what are their productive differences?

Some of these questions were in our minds before the Un/Certainty discussions of the symposium, and they crystallised further through our conversation with the participants. We did not expect the symposium to 'solve' or 'resolve' them. Yet we were also surprised that they seemed so present in some of the discussions at the symposium. Our proposal is to explore them in two continuing ways:

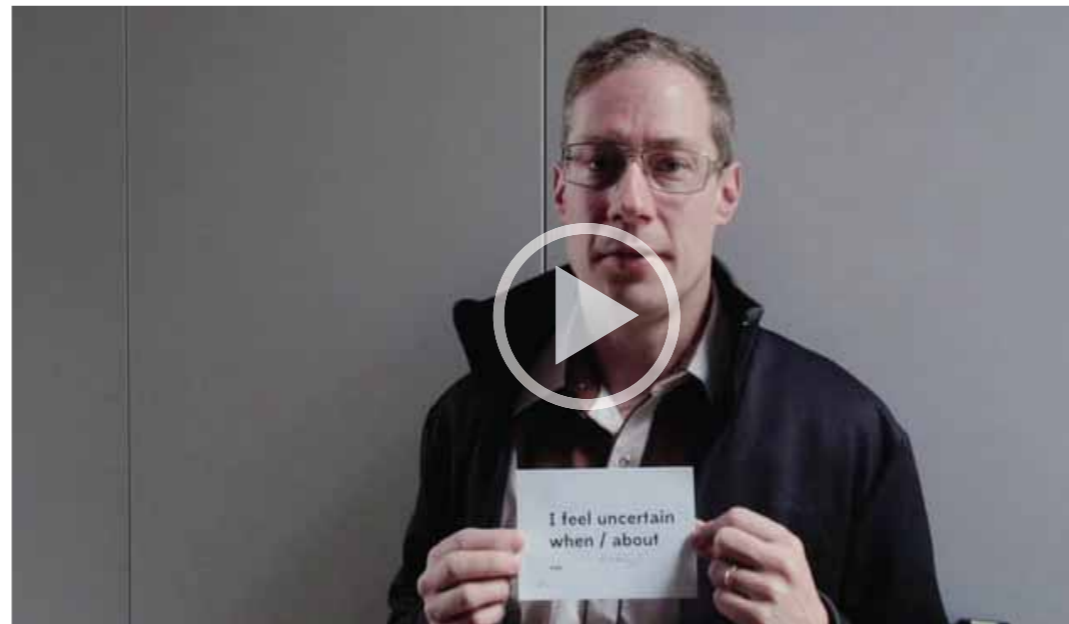
1. Through practice-based inquiry - in developing future experimental projects through which the relationalities that we have identified and the issues that need interrogation will be played out. In other words, to turn the reflective inquiry of our practices / disciplines into a project for ourselves to undertake.
2. Through honest and open discussion, self reflection and interrogation of existing works and practices, undertaken collaboratively with our companions in the Design+Ethnography+Futures journey.



?

**I feel uncertain  
when / about**  
... How easy it is for  
people to open to other disciplines?  
....

and the extent to which  
we can, need to, should.



Robert Willim

**I feel uncertain  
when / about**  
... even more!

For the last hour I've been  
thinking a lot about forms of  
reciprocity that might  
enable more of a dialogue  
between design & ethnography.  
I have recently come across  
the term para-valence -  
being alongside - commonality  
in difference that seems  
helpful.

Top: Anonymous; Bottom: Anonymous

what happened over the  
two days, but that's ok...  
I feel ok!

Yoko

Top: Anonymous; Bottom: Yoko Akama



**Design+Ethnography+Futures 2014**  
<http://d-e-futures.com/>