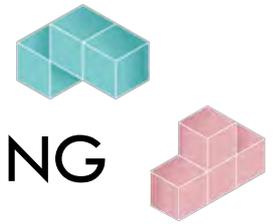


NORDES 2021



# BIG ENOUGH STORIES OF UN/MAKING POLLINATION

Li Jönsson, Åsa Ståhl, Kristina Lindström and  
Saskia Gullstrand

XXXXX  
AFFILIATION  
NAME@NAME.EDU

## ABSTRACT

In this workshop we invite the Nordes community to explore how to tell big enough stories in relation to plant-pollinator-relationships out of sync, where the design experiments are guided by the notion of matters-of-care in relation to matters-of-scale. How can we use designerly means to scale distant and almost intangible challenges concerning plant-pollinator relationships into big enough stories that are possible to care for?

This question will be explored through the project Un/Making Pollination, that consists of two parts: poetic comic-posters that invite for a multimodal form of storytelling, and an invitation to make hand pollination tools. Both of these attempts to generate caring relationships but approach matters of pollination through different scales.

## INTRODUCTION

The recently published Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES 2019) describes large scale challenges such as massive decline in plant and animal species such as insect-pollinators. This is one out of many reports and observations that articulates and predicts a limited future. Such knowledge and facts in reports and scientific papers are of thorough importance but might also be overwhelming and hard to grasp, as it spans both across temporal and geographical scales. To address the issue of pollinators the IPBES-report (2019) suggest strategies that range in ambition and timescale from immediate, to relatively

large-scale and long-term responses that aim to transform our relationship with nature.

As design researchers, we ask ourselves and the Nordes community: How can we access and respond to this issue that expands across different temporal and geographical scales? How can we make it present and make it felt in ways that open up for caring relationships? Can such relationships be configured at large scale or only as intimate close relations? How can we allow this matter-of-fact to become a matter-of-care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017)? These questions will be discussed through Haraway's (2016) call for thickening the present and telling big enough stories - stories that can collect up what is needed here and now. How do we know if the stories are big enough to move the participant(s) - to make issues of pollination into matters-of-care?

## MATTERS OF FACT, CONCERN AND CARE

To give some background, this project is situated within the growing engagement amongst experimental design researchers inspired by Science and Technology Studies (STS). Specifically, it draws on methods and approaches from participatory design (PD) and aims to contribute to the ongoing investigation of the democratic potential of contemporary design engagements, referred to as 'democratic experiments' or 'design thinging' (Binder et al. 2015). This work originates from Latour's (2008b) call to the design community to take on the challenge to develop tools for visualising matters-of-concern. According to Latour (2005), matters-of-concern are typically uncertain, constantly in the making and entangled in each other and allows the contradictory and controversial to become public. In contrast, a designerly matters-of-fact is stable and settled and can be exemplified by the likes of CAD technology used for visualising objects (2008b), but ignores the negotiations taking place in the making of the object, or beyond in user-time. Likened to a theatre, the move from a matter-of-fact, to a matter-of-concern can be described through shifting attention from the stage to the whole machinery of a theatre (Latour, 2008a). Similarly, another shift is happening when directing attention to our recent troubling epoch;

where challenges such as loss of biodiversity and severe climate change calls upon us. Author et al. (2019) and Author and Author (2019) have suggested the additions to the democratic experiments by adding insight from Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) work on care. Puig de la Bellacasa, who also draws from matters-of-fact/concern suggests that the addition of care extends the "we" to more-than human others. This extension or rearticulation of the "we" can be understood as an attempt to "decentre anthropocentric ethics" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, p.217). Secondly, Puig de la Bellacasa suggests that "matters of care aim to add something to matters-of-fact/concern with the attention of not only respecting them but of getting further involved in their becoming" (Bellacasa, 2017, p. 66). Matters-of-care is clearly less about deconstructing or explaining matters-of-fact, but is a suggestion to "engage with them so that they generate caring relationalities" (Bellacasa, 2017, p.66).

Hence, drawing on our previous work, our articulation of caring design experiments can be seen as a thickening of the designerly repertoire to the design experiments, one concerned with both care and the more than human. Hence in this workshop we will try to address the design experiments guided by the notion of matters-of-care in relation to matters-of-scale.

#### THICK PRESENTS AND BIG ENOUGH STORIES: MATTERS-OF-SCALE

In our designerly attempts to address and engage with matters-of-scale, as a matters-of-care, we turn to Donna Haraway (2016a) and her call for stories that thicken the present. Good stories, she writes, "...reach into rich pasts to sustain thick presents to keep the story going for those who come after" (Haraway 2016a, p.125). The thickening of the present can thereby be understood as a kind of expansion of what we usually understood as the now, which has the potential of bringing things that matter across temporal scales into the present - like a tentacular web of troubling relations that matters now. In that sense stories of thick presents might also have consequences for what we care about and how.

With telling stories that attempt to thicken the present comes another matter of scale: that of telling *big enough* stories. Responding to grand and potentially universalising narratives of the Anthropocene, which run the risk of becoming too big, Haraway (2016a) suggests *big enough* as an alternative guiding principle. Big enough stories do not attempt to tell everything, but "... are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections" (Haraway 2016a, p 101). Importantly these are stories that are situated somewhere, and that collect up what is needed at a particular time and place, so that it can be handed over and matter also to others. With reference to Ursula Le Guin, Haraway describes

big enough stories like shelves "that can hold a little water or a few seeds, that can somehow be collected, offered and taken" (Haraway 2016b, 22.52).

Through Haraway's articulation of thick presents and big enough stories we are thus invited to consider the time scales of matters we care for as well as the scale of the narratives we craft in order to respond to these matters in response-able and caring ways.

How can we, as designers, give form to big enough stories that turn away from thin futures towards thick presents and futures? And, what role can each and everyone of us have - as citizens and, of course, as designers and design researchers - in contributing to generative co-living of plants, pollinators and other actors? How can we work collaboratively across species for livable futures? How can things be otherwise - how can we intervene and be moved into and with the issue of loss of pollinators?

#### UN/MAKING POLLINATION

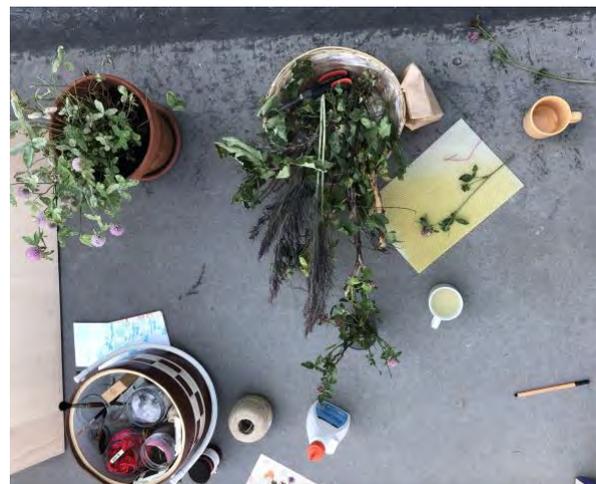


Figure 1: Example of materials brought into the workshop.

In response to the questions articulated above concerning how things at different scales can become matters of care, we have set up a design experiment consisting of two parts. Both of these attempts to generate caring relationships approach matters of pollination through different scales. The first one, that consists of three posters that shows plant pollinator relationships out of sync, reaches across different timescales including historical anchoring. The second one, that consists of an invitation to make and try out hand pollination tools, opens up for a situated one-to-one scale engagement. A guiding principle has been to neither enact an apocalyptic approach nor a continuation of the dominant tech-fix, business as usual ideas. Rather, through the posters and hand pollination tools we try to articulate big enough stories expressed through means that can disturb the dominant stories.



Figure 2: The three different poster depicting Red Clover, Strawberries and Almond.

*Part one:* As part of the project we have made riso-printed A3 posters focusing on three different plants and their associated pollinators: Red Clover, Strawberries and Almond. The central panel in each of the three posters shows an anatomical version of the plant with pollinators buzzing around it. The aim was not to show it in the correct 1:1 scale, but rather to draw attention to the co-living of plants and pollinators. Surrounding the central panel each poster has individual and sequential panels that show how pollination becomes over time with nature and culture. For example, there is a panel that shows how bumblebees are shipped in boxes across Europe to arrive right on time when flowers are in bloom to “correct” a current mismatch between presence of pollinators and the expected yield from plants.

Another panel shows grazing cows eating red clover. Their manure contributes to the fertilization of the soil. All panels are based on research, but the posters are not to be taken as straightforward and self-explanatory science communication.



Figure 3: Examples of hand-pollination tools developed during a field visit to a local Scandinavian nut orchard.

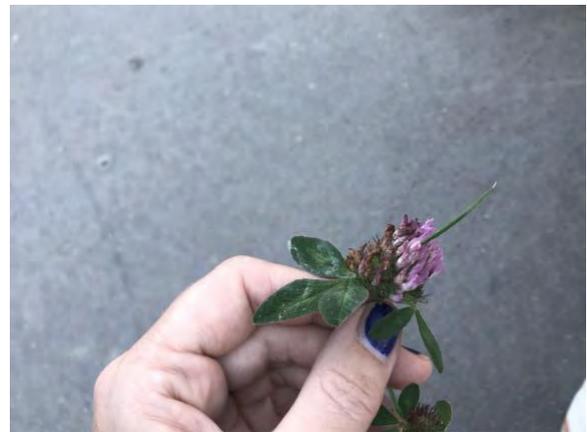


Figure 4: Examples of experimental formats of hand-pollination tools for Red Clover.

Rather than promising accuracy and facts they are made in a poetic comics lineage (Groensteen 2007). The posters' job is to be attractive, intriguing and function as a tool for a multimodal form of storytelling, alluring participants to engage deeper with the thick present of pollinators, eco systems, people and plants. Additionally, they are to be supplemented by the presence of, for example, researchers and other narrators as well as workshop elements such as the making of hand-pollination tools.

*Part two:* The hand-pollination tools are introduced into the workshop setting as a way of getting sensitized to the particularities of pollinating the three different plants: to experience the scale of the meeting between the tool, the plant and the human hand. The making of tools and trying them out is also introduced in the workshop in order to open up for discussions on past, present and possible future human involvement in pollination. Materials for the hand-pollination tools include, but is not limited to, cotton, yarn, hair, bees' wax, sticks, and some version of the plant itself.

## OUTLINE WORKSHOP - OVERVIEW OF PRACTICALITIES

**Title of the workshop:** Big enough stories of un/making pollination

**Motivation:** How to scale distant and almost intangible challenges concerning plant-pollinator relationships into big enough stories that are possible to care for: what materials and designerly support can be used to approach and respond to urgent matters of un/making pollination?

**Length:** A half-day workshop

**Tentative programme:** The workshop begins with three (big enough) stories of plant-pollinators-relationships out of sync - Red Clover, Almond tree and Strawberry. The stories are told through a combination of oral storytelling and posters.

The workshop continues through making and trying out tools for hand-pollination. This breadth of scales is also an opportunity to get to the matter of care and try to articulate how to participate in the un/making of pollination. Or more specifically, how we already or how hope to participate in the un/making of specific plant-pollinator-human-relationships in the future.

The workshop ends with a discussion on and documentation of how we can use designerly means to scale distant and almost intangible challenges concerning plant-pollinator relationships into big enough stories that are possible to care for.

**Participant acceptance process and criteria:** We will advertise the workshop in available networks, and will practice a first come, first served principle. Approximately 20 participants.

**Materials and physical location:** We will bring the material that is needed and we are flexible with space. Outdoors could work well, particularly if there is a sheltering roof.

In case the pandemic requires so, the workshop can be adjusted and accommodated to remote participation since there are versions of the posters that can be printed on a common printer, and other materials can be sourced in most places.

## REFERENCES

Author et al

Author and author

- Binder, T., Brandt, E., Ehn, P. & Halse J. 2015. Democratic design experiments: between parliament and laboratory. *CoDesign: International Journal of CoCreation in Design and the Arts*, 11, (3-4). 152-165.
- European Commission (2018). Pollinators: importance for nature and human well-being, drivers of decline and the need for monitoring. Science for Environment Policy. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/research/newsalert/pdf/issue-23-2020-05-pollinators-future-brief\\_en\\_v2.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/research/newsalert/pdf/issue-23-2020-05-pollinators-future-brief_en_v2.pdf)
- Groensteen, T. (2013). Comics and narration. Univ. Press of Mississippi.
- Haraway, D. (2016a). *Staying with the trouble. Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Haraway, D. (2016b, May 26). Anthropocene Consortium Series. [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWQ2JYFwJWU&t=1266s>
- Latour, B. (2005). From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public. In: B. Latour, & P. Weibel (eds.), *Making Things Public: atmospheres of democracy* (pp.14–41). Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Latour, Bruno (2008a). 'The Style of Matters of Concern'. Spinoza Lecture at the University of Amsterdam: Van Gorcum.
- Latour, B. (2008b). *A cautious Prometheus? A few steps toward a philosophy of design (with special attention to Peter Sloterdijk)*. In Proceedings of the 2008 annual international conference of the design history society (pp. 2-10).
- Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2017). *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.