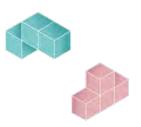# STORIES FOR COLLABORATIVE SURVIVAL

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ABSTRACT

What if this abstract was actually the middle of the story? And instead of it being a summary of what we try to do in this workshop, by individual 'heroes' that summarize the whole text, this section would be a collective account of why the text is worth reading and sharing. What if this section was not the beginning of a linear story, but a passage in a circular (re)telling of a shared experience? What if experimenting with such non-linear stories might change the way we tell stories in and through design? In this workshop we invite the design research community to explore how to situate sustainability through storytelling. In this workshop we explore how to bring forward individual neglected stories, dislodging heroic and universalist narratives, to explore how we can collectively listen, share, co-create and tell stories that can contribute to survival across individual and social scales.

INTRODUCTION

We need new kinds of stories to prepare for life in the ruins of modernity, however "(n)ot all stories are equally useful in engaging us with collaborative survival" (Tsing et al. 2017). How do we know which stories are useful? Do we need to create other and better stories for surviving on a damaged planet? And how can such stories survive? How can storytelling bridge different scales, connecting the local with the collective? How can we explore this through participatory design? In this workshop we invite participants to join us in exploring mundane neglected stories through telling, creating and sharing, with a critical eye toward what makes stories "useful in engaging us with collaborative survival". The goal of the workshop is to explore starting the questions of collective survival from the smallest scale possible: our everyday stories, our disorganized messes and from there explore how changing the narrative, from heroic global narratives to interconnected local messy stories may change the way we approach matters of survival. As a form of exploration, we take as our starting point mundane objects and behaviours from our everyday lives, and work towards developing collective stories of collaborative survival, experimenting with different practices of foregrounding and backgrounding, material forms, and narrative styles. In the workshop we will listen, learn, suggest and explore stories that relate to our ability to survive a planet in crisis. The collective stories made will be shared in the group, and we will explore how and whether those stories should be carried further by others, connecting the small to large scales of

stories and collective survival. Large scale is here figured as the global question of collective survival and of heroic storytelling, whereas small scale refers to the everyday, the mundane, the unheroic, the level at which we can connect to 'our local'. Stories scale easily, but what if situated stories lose their relevance, their wisdom if they are scaled up? What if we refuse to scale, to break the smoothness in scalability?.

CLIMATE ACTION AND STORYTELLING

To stay within planetary boundaries, and to meet social foundations, our societies need to transform radically (Raworth, 2012; Rockström et al. 2009). While this has been known since the 80's, we are nowhere near making the needed reduction in carbon emissions to stay within the 1.5-degree limit on global warming. According to Nightingale et al. (2020), the reason for this failure to act is the framing of climate change itself. By focusing on technical climate research, not linking the global aspect to local action and by disconnecting nature from society, other ways of knowing, such as those embedded in our lived experiences and cultural memories, have been marginalised. How we share these knowledges is important, scientific studies often attempt to disentangle natural cycles from anthropogenic causes, whereas oral traditions have an ability to merge natural histories of landscape with local social histories (Cruikshank, 2012). In order to comprehend climate change as a direct risk and to motivate ourselves to take it up more vigorously, Nightingale et al. (2020) urge for a reframing of climate change in a way that it becomes inclusive of people and their places. Further to this issue of connecting the social and local to the technical scale of climate change action, has been the issue of navigating and connecting the local versus global scales of climate change and climate action. In what we see as an attempt of connecting these scales, the phrase "think global, act local" has been a guiding motto in climate action. However, this way of connecting these scales encourages an universalist view of humanity, which is not only problematic from an imposition of a western worldview, but it also makes the local and the personal become less important by implying that a thinking globally - in general - could be equally applied every place - in specific (Mignolo, 2012; Vazquez, 2017). Hence, in this workshop we explore how to situate climate action, exploring ways of connecting and relating local and global, social and technological scales. We explore these multi scale connections through storytelling. Stories and thus storytelling is an act of communication, stories travel and connect people through meaning and time. That is, stories that are seen as relevant to life get shared further through webs of

people. Also, stories, carried through time can connect us back to the past and point to different futures, allowing us to relate to different scales of time.

Storytelling is an act of connecting between individual and collective, between local happenings and wider issues that can inform life choices. However, we also need to pay attention to which stories are told and how they can frame different ways of being and acting in the world in relation to climate action and in relation to the type of narrative and culture they carry. We believe we have to move away from the focus on universalist stories that pose individual solutions and thus we also need to move away from heroic, saviour, stories which highlight individuals over collectivity

HEROIC VERSUS UNHEROIC STORIES

By introducing the titan Prometheus, who defaced the ruling gods and gave fire to humanity as a symbol of modernism, science scholar Bruno Latour (2008) has called for the opposite to such heroic gestures in the name of design. If the Greek titan enabled progress by radically breaking with the past and avoiding the consequences, the opposite he says, to take the qualities of design, of adding to something in a modest way, is to revolutionize progress. Design could thus be thought of as the anti-hero, or as a post-Prometheus. However, if we look at contemporary stories and the narratives being created in the Western world and in our field of design, we learn about many titans; we hear narratives of heroism centered on the figures of a conqueror, a problem-solver, a saviour that individually stands above all other humans and, alone change the course of history. In 1988, the science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin explains in the 'Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' (2019) that heroic stories are centrally concerned with conflict, strategies and victories, and on carrying a central hero in its front. They are linear, finite stories. Heroic and universalist narratives are dominant in the Western progress-driven story of our time. This individualistic focus - on people or solutions - goes against the ideals of collective survival and of collaboration that is argued by many to be the most important aspect to reach the sustenance of life on earth (see for example Grinspoon, 2016; Latour, 2017; Lovelock, 1995). Moving away from the heroic and universalist way of storytelling, we believe shining light into everyday life and on the actions and stories that we perform, stories and practices that are hidden and hindered by global writings of history from a heroic Wester progress-driven perspective, can reveal diverse ways of being with the planet and of contributing to individual and collective survival.

UNHEROIC EVERYDAY LIFE: NEGLECTED STORIES

The unheroic stories, neglected in heroic narratives, happen in a different time and scale. These neglected stories are small, local, mundane stories. As Le Guin

puts it, these stories are "the other story, the untold one, the life story" (Le Guin. p.33. 2019). According to her, these neglected everyday stories are non-linear, they don't end with a climax, instead, they are a knotty handful of threads that connect you to ever more stories. These stories relate to local skills in living, to the delight in being part of the world and to an awareness of belonging to the world. These might, for example, involve knowing our kinship as animals with animals or plants, the landscape and/or with natural phenomena. Le Guin (2019) argues that stories of hunting and killing have made readers to imagine that individual heroism is the point of a story:

"[W]hat we actually did to stay alive and fat was gather seeds, roots, sprouts, shoots, leaves, nuts, berries, fruits, and grains, adding bugs and mollusks and netting or snaring birds, fish, rats, rabbits, and other tuskless small fry to up the protein. And we didn't even work hard at it [...]. The average prehistoric person could make a nice living in about a fifteen-hour work week. Fifteen hours a week for subsistence leaves a lot of time for other things. So much time that maybe the restless ones who didn't have a baby around to enliven their life, or skill in making or cooking or singing, or very interesting thoughts to think, decided to slope off and hunt mammoths. The skilful hunters then would come staggering back with a load of meat, a lot of ivory, and a story. It wasn't the meat that made the difference. It was the story." (p.25. 2019)

Neglected stories are stories that attempt to bring forward mundane local actions that include knowledge attentive and inclusive to place and people. As Cruickhank (2012) said about the role of (oral) storytelling: 'I recognised how narrators were using these narratives to explain choices each had made in her own life. They spoke about transitions from childhood to adulthood to middle and old age in ways that demonstrated how such foundational narratives provide the intellectual and narrative scaffolding for achieving a well-lived life. The stories provided a framework that enabled these women to tell stories of coherence about their own lives 'as though the world were inherently transformational and intrinsically subject to change' (Gow 2001, 10). In a similar path, Haraway (2016) suggests that stories of fiction and nature-cultural facts need to give room for both conflicting and messy tales that can be used for retelling as well as re-seeding narratives. In other words,it is not just our ability to tell stories that is important, but also our ability to listen.

Le Guin's story of the carrier bag is, more than a story about early humans who would survive by carrying more than can be held in the hand, also a method for storytelling, story-making and story-gathering. Unlike the spear, which follows a linear trajectory towards its target, kind of linear way we have come to think of time

and history in the West, the carrier bag by LeGuin is more like a sack of potatoes, a mess of stuff where a thing is entangled with another, with contradiction, difference and simultaneity. In this kind of story-making, gathering and telling,, stories should never end, but rather lead to further stories through connection and gathering, like a forager putting various things in a bag to guarantee their survival rather than a hunter waiting for the big kill. In this workshop we explore how to bring forward unheroic neglected stories from our everyday lives and how we can collectively listen, share, co-create and tell stories that can contribute to collective survival across individual and social scales.

WORKSHOPPING STORIES

The participatory design workshop is divided into four moments: sharing, moving, connecting and carrying. Together these moments represent a process of moving between scales, elevating the mundane of everyday life, the potentially neglected or forgotten, into view of each other, a level of interaction and finally to a moment of sharing, of sending the stories to others. Throughout the day we will use a variety of senses through audio and video tools to support our explorations into different ways of framing our everyday life spaces, objects, and experiences.

Sharing: We start the trust-building process through engaging in partial glimpses of the neglected aspects of our daily life spaces and situations, exploring what has been left unkempt and appears messy. We are not merely asking what we can experience through different modes of engagement by enhancing some senses, while removing others, but rather we are exploring our resistances, our urges to paint a favorable picture as we give extra attention to the neglected. We practice listening and explore how the materials and stories connect us to scales of time (past present and future) and to social scales (between individuals and the collective). This will be done in groups so that every story can be heard and shared. Through this sharing, the groups will begin to develop a vocabulary of survival in the present, making connections between the diverse stories of each other.

Moving: Taking sharing as a departure point, in this moment of the workshop we will connect stories into collaborative accounts that we make relevant to be shared forward for collaborative survival. After forms of collaborative stories are assembled in the groups, we will focus on practicing collaborative unheroic storytelling through different performative forms. Guidelines and inspiration will be made available by the organisers.

Connecting: In the third moment, we will explore different examples of storytelling from non-Western perspectives that focus on collective survival and

relation to place, people and non-human aspects. We will use these examples to reflect on the stories we have created during the workshop to see how they connect us to place, as well as to non-humans.

Carrying: Finally, we will conclude by jointly identifying relations between design, storytelling, scales (local/global) and sustainability. The collaborative stories made in the groups will now be communicated back to all workshop participants, literally trying to scale up stories to be carried further by others. Together these moments represent a scaling process, elevating the mundane of everyday life, the potentially neglected or forgotten, into a level of interaction between and among, and finally a sending off to others. This part resembles the carrier bag, where we collect stories that offer more complexity but can also be used and travel beyond the space of the workshop.

PRACTICAL OVERVIEW

DURATION: The workshop runs as a full day online engagement.

PREPARATION: A few weeks before the workshop, participants will receive a mail asking them to prepare their introductions on a Mior board, do some light reading, and get familiar with workshop tools.

THE WORKSHOP: The workshop moves through four moments: sharing, moving, connecting and carrying. In the first moment (sharing) we give an introduction to the theme and to the schedule of the workshop. We then divide into groups of 3 to 5 people. The participants explore their stories within their groups through guided activities. In the second moment (moving) we explore the combination of the stories in the group and ways to tell them through different formats. For this we will provide material for writing and for creating material representations of the stories. After this, we provide inspiration, through video, from different storytelling traditions to inform a reflection on the collective stories that were created (connecting). In the final moment of the workshop (carrying) we join the whole group for a final reflection and for sharing the final stories among the participants and, if possible, share with other conference participants.

PARTICIPANT ACCEPTANCE PROCESS: by signing up

PLACE: Online via Zoom and Miro as a base.

MATERIAL & TECHNOLOGY: During the workshop we will be exploring different online tools using our own accounts when possible. We are interested in access to

Spatial Chat or other collaborative conferencing tools if they become available.

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