AEGIS *le Libellio d'*

TIRÉ A PART

Kimbell Lucy (2009-2010) "Art and design practices as organisational R&D", *Le Libellio* d'Aegis, volume 5, n° 4, Hiver, pp. 01-07

Sommaire

Art and design practices as organisational R&D

Scene 1 → 2001

I am wondering whether to call a friend and ask her where the questionnaire I gave her is. Over some months I have been handing out this questionnaire to people who know me, friends, colleagues, collaborators, members of my family, ex-lovers, competitors, clients, my former boss. The form, which I created, asks them to consider and estimate what I am worth. It starts with the disclaimer that this exercise is an art project and that completing the questionnaire will, hopefully, not affect our relationship, although I know of course it must. This friend chooses not to fill it in and seems quite angry that I had thought she would do so. Around 70 other people, however, do fill it in and give it back to me. Later the results are assembled, analysed and published in my book, *Audit* (Kimbell, 2002).

Scene 2 → 2007

I'm sitting in the studio of London-based designers live/work, who are one of a small number of specialist consultancies involved in designing services, not products or logos or buildings. I watch as the three designers assemble a representation of what they call the "customer journey" on the wall. They create this in order to bring together what they learned from themselves trialling the service we are studying. This service helps people trying to give up smoking using genetic testing to identify the right level of nicotine replacement therapy, along with face-to-face encounters in a pharmacy and online resources to support the person while they give up. The designers create the representation using print-outs of photographs they took when they visited the pharmacy, print-outs from the website, and sticky notes with their annotations. As they assemble and then critique this customer journey, the designers scale up and down from the detail of one of the service "touchpoints" such as the poster in the pharmacy window, to the value behind the service itself. They seem to be having fun while they do this.

Scene 3 → 2009

I sit at a breakfast meeting organised by PR agency Editorial Intelligence in London, a group of cultural leaders speculate about the future of the cultural sector under the next (presumably Conservative) government. One of the speakers is the person who is likely to be the culture minister in that government, if his party wins, Ed Vaizey MP. Much of the discussion is concerned with how the Labour government has used the arts as an agent of economic policy over the previous 12

years in an attempt to increase social inclusion. In contrast, says the Conservative MP, his party thinks the arts have an intrinsic value. Another speaker is the artistic director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, writer Ekow Eshun, who says arts organisations and artistic practices are important because they undertake R&D, helping us understand who we are and how we live.

I begin with these three scenes to surface particular moments in my own life as an undisciplined artist who is also a designer who has been an entrepreneur and who is also a researcher, currently masquerading as a social scientist in a management school, where among other things, I teach design and design management on the MBA. This short essay gives me an opportunity to trace my own journey between them and through doing so, raise some questions about the value of art and design practices in relation to organizational life.

During my audit, one of the sections in my questionnaire asked respondents what they would pay me, and for what kind of activities. For one respondent, the answer was an amusing and provocative "You wouldn't do it and I wouldn't ask". Another wanted to pay me pints of beer for emotional advice, and so on. Several thought my value was constituted in my consulting work rather than my art practice, reflecting – perhaps with some justification– the market value manifested in the daily rate I charge as a design and innovation consultant (reasonably high), in comparison with my income from art projects (unreasonably negative). To my mind, the practices involved were not so different, the starting point often being a question that began "What happens if I do this?", driven by curiosity about a particular set of organisational or institutional circumstances that I wanted to enquire into. But the data I created told me that there was a difference between my art and the design practices, at least as far as they were understood by respondents whom I had enrolled within this enquiry, many of whom knew me through making art and doing design.

In what follows, I explore issues connected with this "finding" from my audit into my own value against a background of recent interest in design within management and organization studies. I then propose ways to understand the value of art and design practices in relation to organisational and institutional contexts as a kind of cultural R&D.

It is 40 years since Simon (1969) published *The Sciences of the Artificial*. In it, he argued for an understanding of management and other professions as a kind of design activity in his oft-quoted claim: "Everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones" (Simon, 1996, p. 111). Simon's view of design was as a search procedure for solving problems. His work has been important in engineering design, but within other design fields in the art-school tradition, Simon's top-down, rationalistic version of design has been something to struggle against, even if his definition is often a starting point for definitions of design (*eg* Buchanan, 1992). Further, while it argued for the importance of design, Simon's account was not able to offer a convincing account of how design activities generate new concepts (Hatchuel, 2001; Hatchuel & Weil, 2009). Nor did it correspond well how many designers went about doing design in practice.

Design and its relation to innovation have become important topics for some management and organisation scholars, who have been revisiting Simon over the past decade. Shaped by their experience of working with architect Frank Gehry during the design of a new building for their business school, Boland and Collopy (2004) gathered researchers and practitioners from fields as diverse as organization studies, composition and software design to try to assess what design might offer management. Distinguishing between what they call a "design attitude" and a "decision attitude", Boland and Collopy describe the latter as the basis of management practice and education, in which the challenge facing managers is conceived of as choosing between alternative options, instead of the former, which is more suitable when trying to create new ones. For Boland and Collopy, managers need to combine both.

More recently, the term "design thinking" has emerged as the way that several people are exploring what design approaches bring to management and innovation, with three new books recently being published. One, by Roger Martin (2009), dean of the Rotman School of Management, argues that managers should be more like designers to achieve competitive advantage. A second, by Tim Brown (2009) of international design consultancy IDEO, provides accounts that describe both the consultancy's approach and those of other organisations in which innovations have been developed through a collaborative human-centred, iterative process, involving visualisation and prototyping. A third, by Tom Lockwood (2009), president of the Design Management Institute, is an anthology of accounts of the way design has impacted (positively) on organisations seeking to innovate in through building strong brands and the design of services and customer experiences.

What these books share is a conviction that the ways professional designers, educated in the art school tradition, go about doing things offer an important resource to organisations wanting to innovate. Whether "design thinking", or some other term, is the right way to describe what goes on within design activities undertaken by professional designers, their clients and collaborators, end users and other stakeholders, and the artefacts, institutions and processes involved, what is becoming clearer is that design practices are an important resource for organisations, and that they are not well understood.

Designers may talk about professions and disciplines, but in comparison to other fields such as engineering, medicine or law, their institutions are weak and the value of what they do remains unclear (Tether, 2009). What designers do has changed over the past four decades as practitioners have extended their remit away from the design of tangible objects such as consumer goods, buildings and album covers to digital communications, brands, interactions and more recently, the design of services. In 2001 a Google search for "service design" returned no results (Downs 2008). There now exists a small and ambitious community of service design professionals mostly working in consultancies, who together with an even smaller number of academics, are concerned with organising and institutionalising their growing field (Service Design Network, 2009). They see their expertise as bringing design approaches, methods and tools to service organisations wanting to improve them or innovate.

Drawing on, and in some cases discovering for themselves, research findings from service marketing and service operations, these designers bring a holistic approach to designing services that draws on adjacent fields such as interaction design (*eg* Moggridge, 2006) and experience design (*eg* Bate & Robert, 2007) that is based in the embodied, aesthetic and playful practices taught in many design and art schools. Like other kinds of contemporary design practitioner, they attend to the imagined or researched experiences of end-users and other stakeholders as a starting point for design. Like the architects studied by Yaneva (2005), service designers' practices involve scaling up and down, attending to the detail of the design of touchpoints (the artefacts and human interactions that make up service encounters) as well as to the orchestration and arrangement of the service as a whole. By attending to the material arrangements of a service such as posters, websites, retail outlets and packaging (Kimbell, 2009; 2008) they foreground the tangibility of services, in contrast to the dominant view of their intangibility. By creating boundary objects (Star & Greisemer, 1989) such as representations of the customer journey, sketches and prototypes that visualise a service and the experience it offers end-users, the designers help multi-functional organisational teams engage with one another and work together from an emic perspective.

Thus far I have focussed on attempts made to understand and explain the value of design-based approaches in organizational life, with a brief description of a new kind of practitioner who brings this to the design of services. But earlier I made the claim that for me, at least, there was not a great distinction between art and design practices although they are institutionally validated, regulated and accounted for in different ways. I see both as a process of enquiry into what matters, concerned with the disassembly and assembly of socio-material arrangements of things and people over time and space, involving paying particular attention to the visual and the performative, underpinned by a willingness to engage in institutional critique. What these practices do is undertake cultural R&D by

- • creating and arranging artefacts into new kinds of assemblage and new sets of relations
- • enrolling others in these networks
- • attending to the aesthetics of arranging and organising
- • opening up enquiries that sometimes do not have a goal other than asking a question such as "What happens if I do this?"
- • challenging practitioners and those they work with to tolerate and embrace uncertainty and ambiguity about purpose, process and outcome.

These practices are a resource for organizations, and for research into organizations, in at least two ways.

Firstly, art and design practices are a resource when they undertake research *for* organizations. Designers do research of different kinds during the design process, for example seeking to construct interpretations about the needs, values and practices of end-users and in some cases involve them in co-design. This approach echoes research in management and organization studies (Verganti, 2009; Ravasi & Rindova, 2008), which sees innovative organisations as those involved in creating proposals to a network of interpreters that includes designer and artists in forging new meanings for products and services and creating symbolic value. For Verganti (2009), for example, undertaking R&D about meaning is an important resource for organisations seeking to innovate and what he calls "design-driven innovation" is a way to organise it. Where I would depart from Verganti is his emphasis on creating new meanings for products and services. Instead, I see art and design practices as involved in assembling new sets of relations and new kinds of public. Whether conceived of as relational aesthetics (*eg* Bourriaud, 2002), or as creating new kinds of public (*eg* Latour & Weibel, 2005), the emphasis in these practices is on creating relations, not objects, although artefacts may play an important role in assembling them.

Secondly, these practices do research *about* organizations, although not necessarily in ways they want or understand. The second approach is one that is less understood outside of the worlds of contemporary art and design, and is not necessarily easily digested by organisations or researchers. Contemporary artists working in several traditions including visual art, performance and activism explore organising by doing their own version of it, sometimes directly investigating business and management, sometimes more informal arrangements. For example work by Orgacom[1] (Netherlands), Anna Best[2] (UK), Carey Young[3] (UK), The Yes Men[4] (US) sets up enquiries into current institutional arrangements by assembling new sets of relations, often around key artefacts, although the value of the art is not reducible to a determinate object. Work by some designers such as Dunne and Raby[5] can also be viewed as undertaking research into what matters in science and technology and how these shape social and organizational arrangements.

Both ways of thinking about art and design practices, as research for or about organizations and organizing, raise questions for those who aim to maintain "art for art's sake" and want to avoid polluting the arts with the concerns of organizations. But for those who are willing to acknowledge how implicated we all are in organizing and organizations, whether formally constituted and institutionalised or not, these practices in art and design offer a valuable and as yet unexplored resource. Contemporary art and design practices are a kind of R&D which enquires into who we are, what matters and how we organize and are organized.

Scene 4 → 2011

I watch the students as they start an exercise during the first term of a new post-graduate course which combines art and design approaches with the social sciences and management. We have set them a brief to investigate the experience of a health service provider by focussing on what end-users hear by creating field recordings of audio in health service organisations. Then we want them to present to us a time-based representation of that experience, which could take the form of a recorded or live performance, or a poem, for example. The students, who come from many

different backgrounds including public services, social entrepreneurship and engineering, are learning what constitutes a brief in the design school tradition and how to respond to one. Some of them are struggling. We have said that there is no right answer, and no single way to respond to the brief –presenting a poem is not necessarily better than a piece of music, and vice versa. Some of the students really need pushing out of the seminar room to go and start the exercise. Some want to record video as well, but we insist on just audio. Later, the students come back and present their findings to one another in a group critique, some in the form of live performance, some as video clips with only a soundtrack playing. The students are fascinated how diverse their data and interpretations are, and how powerfully the audio communicates something about the experience of end users, the organisation and the service. They are ready now to begin thinking about what they attend to, and what they ignore, in the ways they think about organisations and organising.

References

Bate Paul & Robert Glenn (2007) *Bringing user experience to healthcare improvement: The concepts, methods and practices of experience based design*, Oxford, Radcliffe.

Boland Richard J. & Collopy Fred (2004) "Design matters for management", In Richard J. Boland, and Fred Collopy (Eds.), *Managing as designing*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, pp. 3-18.

Bourriaud Nicholas (2002) *Relational aesthetics*, Dijon, Les Presses Du Réel.

Buchanan Richard (1992) "Wicked problems in design thinking", *Design Issues*, 8(2), pp. 5-21.

Downs Chris (2008) Unpublished presentation at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford.

Brown Tim (2009) Change by design: How design thinking creates new alternatives for business and society: How design thinking can transform organizations and inspire innovation. Harper Business.

Hatchuel Armand (2001) Towards design theory and expandable rationality: The unfinished programme of Herbert Simon, *Journal of Management and Governance*, 5 (3-4), pp. 260-273

Hatchuel Armand & Weil Benoît (2009) C-K design theory: An advanced formulation, *Research in Engineering Design*, 19, pp. 181-192.

Kimbell Lucy (2002) *Audit*, London, Bookworks.

Kimbell Lucy (2008) What do service designers do? Video. 7:16 minutes, http:// www.sbs.ox.ac.uk/D4S

Kimbell Lucy (2009) "The turn to service design", In Julier Guy & Moor Liz (eds), *Design and Creativity: Policy, Management and Practice*, Oxford, Berg.

Latour Bruno & Weibel Peter (2005) *Making things public: Atmospheres of democracy*, Cambridge, MIT Press.

Lockwood Tom (2009) (ed) *Design Thinking: Integrating Innovation, Customer Experience, and Brand Value*, New-York, Random House.

Martin Roger (2009) *Design of Business: Why Design Thinking is the Next Competitive Advantage*, Boston, Harvard Business Press.

Moggridge Bill (2006) *Designing interactions*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.

Ravasi Davide & Rindova Violina (2008) "Symbolic Value Creation", In Barry Daved & Hansen Hans (eds), *Handbook of New Approaches in Management to Organization*, London, Sage Publications.

Service Design Network (2009) http://www.service-design-network.org/.

Simon Herbert A. (1996) *The sciences of the artificial* (3rd ed.), Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.

Star Susan Leigh & Griesemer James R. (1999) Reprint of Star and Griesemer 1989, Institutional Ecology, 'Translations', and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907 - 1939. reprinted in Mario Biagioli (ed.), *The Science Studies Reader*, New York, Routledge, pp. 505-524.

Tether Bruce (2009) Unpublished talk at Service Design Network conference, Madeira.

Verganti Roberto (2009) *Design-driven innovation: Changing the rules of competition by radically innovating what things mean*, Boston, Harvard Business Press.

Yaneva Albena (2005) "Scaling up and down: Extraction trials in architectural design", *Social Studies of Science*, 35(6), pp. 867-894 ■

Lucy Kimbell[6]
Saïd Business School

1. http://www.orgacom.nl
2. http://annabest.info/
3. http://www.careyyoung.com/
4. http://theyesmen.org/
5. http://www.dunneandraby.co.uk/
6. www.lucykimbell.com
   www.designleadership.blogspot.com
   www.twitter.com/lixindex

Secrétariat de rédaction et mise en forme : Michèle Breton