

# Bicycles <sup>and</sup> Plants:

Designing for  
Conviviality  
and Meaningful  
Social Relations  
through  
Collaborative  
Services





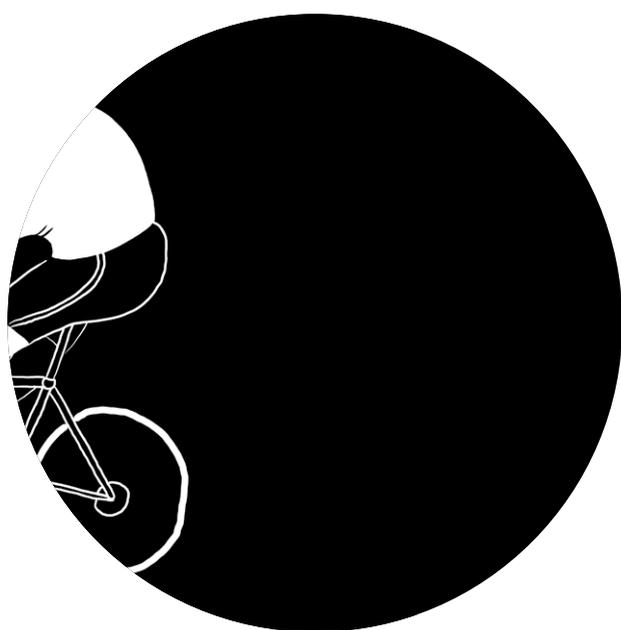




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# Abstract

In our modern times, people's daily needs and affairs are largely arranged by goods and services provided through institutional and market mechanisms. There is little space left for people's capabilities of doing things by themselves. This thesis looks at alternative services bypassing institutional and monetary mechanisms: the type of services where people work with and for each other. It investigates how service design can provide opportunities for people to contribute to and with each other as capable individuals and develop meaningful social relations. Two service cases are investigated. One is an existing service of a self-repair bicycle workshop run by a subcultural community. The other is a series of design interventions called 'Plant Hotel' where people help water other's plants as a form of collaborative care.

The study of the first case of a self-repair bicycle workshop looks at services as capability building. The workshop supports and strengthens people's capabilities in bicycle repair and building. By ethnographically studying the mundane and situated practices, experiences, and materials in the workshop, the study investigates how this kind of service is actually organized and experienced. The findings show that instead of helping make visitors' repair work faster and easier, the community insists on leaving adequate space for people to struggle and negotiate the repair process. Through this finding, differences between the self-repair service where people act as capable agents and commercial ones where people are as served customers are revealed. With this, the study calls awareness to re-examining some taken-for-granted design assumptions, such as the construction of users and the use, and articulated values, especially in the tradition of user-centred design.

The second case of the design interventions of Plant Hotel explores a service as new social relation creation. The series includes five Plant Hotels addressing five types of social relation. By involving people in watering other's plants in the specific context, it discusses what meaningful social relations can be generated from collaborative care for plants. Instead of aiming to provide direct answers, the interventions create opportunities to support and provoke people to look for and negotiate with the meaningfulness. Through the interventions, the thesis proposes a discursive and provocative role of service design that goes beyond the solution-orientated tradition. The new role indicates that the new social relations to be designed do not suggest solutions or preferred models. Rather, they become enquiries into

articulating issues of social distinctions and boundaries, and reflecting and challenging existing social relations.

All in all, this doctoral work proposes service design as an agent of capability building and a relational agent of creating new social relations and challenging social boundaries. It demonstrates the ways in which daily services are designed to support individuals' long-term learning and capability building rather than the easy and fast completion of tasks, and also to open up new spheres for meaningful social relations outside institutionally and economically structured boundaries.



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# Preface



## Meeting Jimmy



Figure 1: This is Jimmy from the bicycle workshop.

*'In winter, there is nowhere to go in the city.  
Actually, recently I find a nice place, the **library**.  
It is free. I often go there to draw and eat chocolates.  
But, the not nice thing is you cannot do anything but just sitting quietly.'*

- Jimmy

Let us start with Jimmy (Figure 1).

He was born and lives in Helsinki. This year, he is turning 33 years old.

I met him in the bicycle workshop that I was studying. He was one of the organizers and volunteers. After learning that he only works for two days per week as a tram driver, I thought it would be easy to book a time slot with him for an interview. I was wrong. He was as busy as professors and top managers whose schedules were always full.

*'No, not next weekend. I have a cycling race to go to.'*

*'No, not the weekdays. I need to organize the race because I won last year.'*

*'No, not that week. We have to renovate our house roof.'*

*'No, not after the workshop closes. We are organizing a movie night to raise money for the workshop.'*

*'Well, I will call you when I have time.'*

One evening when I was cooking dinner, I received his message, *'Hey, I might have some time now. If you are not busy, shall we meet?'*

We finally met for the interview. Thanks to the guy who was supposed to sell him toe clips not being able to make it, Jimmy had a time slot.

There is a lot to tell about Jimmy's life, including his punk bands, squatting experiences, and the building process of 14 bicycles. Here, I present his favourite places in Helsinki. He showed me a different Helsinki as if I had never lived here. I had never been to most of the places where he hangs out frequently. His favourite places in Helsinki have one distinctive character: 'unplanned-ness'.

One of his favourite places is a small piece of 'unplanned' land in Töölö Bay next to the central railway station. Marked as a spot for sightseeing by the city, Töölö Bay has been carefully designed, surrounded by a mini beach, bird watching decks, several wooden villa houses, and a set of well-selected plants and trees. I jogged there every week and had not noticed the place. So, I paid a visit after the interview, expecting a secret wonderland.

However, I was disappointed that it appeared boring, with unattractive wild grass growing, contrasting with other parts of the bay with their beautiful trees and flowers. It seemed a place forgotten

by the urban designers. I asked Jimmy again what he liked about this place.

Surprisingly, the reason was the ‘unplanned-ness’:

*‘There is something special and attractive about that place. Because it is in the peripheral, especially when the peripheral is in the middle of the city. [It is] such a contrast! In the city centre, every place is designed for a purpose, to serve production. But that place does not serve any purpose. So you can breathe and nourish your mind there, unlike Töölö Bay.’*

‘What is wrong with Töölö Bay?’ I attempted to understand more the meanings and aesthetics concerned, also for the personal reason that Töölö Bay is one of my favourite places.

Jimmy’s accounts articulated the aesthetics well:

*‘It [Töölö Bay] is beautiful, of course. I just don’t enjoy a place that is designed for the masses, where you have the signs, “go this way”, “look at this”, “here has a good sight”, “here is a great photo opportunity”. I do not like those. I think the urban space has been over-planned in our modern society. It is quenching your life, making everything more predictable and boring. Nothing surprises you anymore. [There is] no space for imagination or magic. Everything is so readily made and served.’*

This is the beauty underlying an unplanned place, which allows personal exploration and imagination to be nourished. Jimmy’s appreciation of this beauty is a resistant reaction to the increasing regulation and commodification of urban space. When a place is more regulated, so are human behaviours. Those signs Jimmy criticized are made to give people instructions to act so they might enjoy the place better. However, for Jimmy, they are the signs of control and regulation, making things ‘predictable’ and ‘boring’, and even ‘quenching life’.

Moreover, his love-and-hate complaint about the city library helps to understand his values from another perspective. He recently found the city library nice to visit in winter, as it is free of charge and warm. The place also supports his activities of reading books, drawing logos for his bands, and eating chocolates. However, the negative part is that he ‘cannot do anything but just sitting quietly.’ What does he want to do in the library otherwise? But, if we examine what he usually does in his favourite places, his answer is often ‘just relaxing, reading, or doing nothing’. He sounds contradictory. Therefore, what matters for Jimmy is not the content of what he does, but whether he can decide

what to do. He finds the little unplanned area in Töölö Bay attractive is not because he prefers messy and wild grass. It is because this place is not determined by anybody else with a pre-set purpose. He enjoys a place that remains a blank canvas waiting for him to leave his own mark. What mark he leaves might not be the priority. The priority is that nobody else tells him what mark he should leave.

## **Plant Hotel at the Border**

This section presents  
a speculative news report.

# Plant Hotel at the border of North and South Korea

*Panmunjom opens a centre for plant exchange for visitors from both sides*



This spring, Panmunjom, located in the Joint Security Area (JSA) at the border of North and South Korea, is opening an ‘adoption home’ of plants for visitors. It allows visitors to leave domestic plants when they visit the cross-border site from either side and also invites all visitors to water and adopt these plants as they wish. By starting the exchange and joint care for visitors’ plants from two sides, Panmunjom wishes to catalyse more exchange between the people of the two nations.

In 2018, South Korean President Park Geun-Hye paid the first official visit to Pyongyang. Although no more official visits or negotiations

have developed since then, cultural from the two sides have been offering friendly gestures towards dialogue and exchange, with acquiescence for now from both governments. Panmunjom is also open to these new cross-border moves. Growing as a popular ‘sightseeing’ point, Panmunjom is open for people to visit with guided tours. Since the first official talks between South and North Korea in 2018, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of visitors. This spring, Panmunjom is offering a new programme for its visitors. It is called ‘Plant Hotel’, as it borrows the metaphor of a ‘hotel’ where ‘guest plants’ are checked in and out as exchanges between visitors from both sides. Yes, it is actually about

plants. People can bring plants from a selected list when they visit Panmunjom and leave them there. Then, visitors are welcome to water these plants or take one plant home if they wish. The chosen place for 'Plant Hotel' is one of the meeting rooms that cross the border, known as the 'blue room'. Many important meetings between the two nations have been routinely held in these rooms. This place has been chosen because it is the only location between the two nations where visitors need no extra visa permit to step into the other side.

The officer of Panmunjom told us, *'So far, Panmunjom is the only place at the border where the South and the North can have talks and meetings. And as the tension between the two nations has been easing in recent years, we wish Panmunjom to become a more open and relaxed place of exchange. The effort is to make it less political and military. This time, we wish to try to this new concept of Plant Hotel to have one more channel of exchange and dialogue among the people. We wish Panmunjom to continue to be the ground contributing to mutual reconciliation for inter-Koreans.'*

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### How to participate from the South

*(Note: the rules for visiting Plant Hotel from the South are built on and in line with the United Nations Command Regulations.)*

- Entry to Plant Hotel at Panmunjom is only allowed in an organized tour. Seven travel companies designated by UNC- ICSC offer the tour.

- To apply for the tour, you must apply two weeks in advance; people from the following countries three weeks in advance, due to background check from the UNC

*(Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bolivia, Bosnia, Burma, China, Cuba, Egypt, Estonia, Georgia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Lithuania, Macau, Malaysia, Moldova, Morocco, Nigeria, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Palestinian authority, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen).*

- Both for checking in and out: fill the application form from the web page of Plant Hotel and upload a copy of your main passport page.

### How to participate from the North

Information is yet to be announced.

The officer also emphasized that besides checking in, checking out, and watering plants, visitors can also leave messages on a small piece of note board attached to each plant, which will be diligently checked by the officers of course, for the nature and language of the messages, *'Everybody is welcome to bring or adopt plants. But we expect more Koreans to be interested in this opportunity to have an appropriate exchange with the other side.'*

There is already now a plant checked in by an Australian man who teaches English in Seoul, *'I got this plant as a gift from my students in Seoul. I brought it here so hope someone from the North will take it home. I told my students about it, and they were all excited. It might grow up to be a big tree one day, who knows.'*

These plants brought from people from one side and taken by other people from the other side have become the first objects that can circulate freely cross the two nations under current political circumstances. If exchange needs to happen, why not start with plants?

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### Rules

1. You must bring your passport.
  2. Casual or provocative clothes are not allowed (e.g. ripped jeans, shorts, slippers, unkempt or weird-coloured hair).
  3. One plant for one check-in or check-out.
  4. Only plants and soil can be brought. Plastic pots are provided by Plant Hotel.
  5. Only the following plant types are allowed to be checked in: Dieffenbachia, Nephrolepis, Peperomia, and Pothos.
  6. Plants to check in must be no taller than 50cm.
  7. Hand-written messages, but not photos, can be left on the plant's note board. The messages will be checked for suitability.
  8. A lab with plant health experts provides phytosanitary tests for all newly checked-in plants for 48 hours.
  9. Nobody is responsible for the illness or death of plants.
-



# Chapter 1

Introduction

## 1.1. Research Questions

Jimmy is a member of the community who run the self-repair bicycle workshop studied in this thesis. The piece of narrative describes his experiences and engagement with the urban space. His values underlying ‘unplanned-ness’ indicated his active agency in his daily affairs. He prefers unplanned places where his personal exploration and imagination are allowed to flourish and where he can leave his mark without it being pre-determined by others. Contrarily, carefully designed and well-thought-out places are relevant to negative experiences of regulation and prediction. This essential DIY ethics that Jimmy holds helps to understand the community’s way of conceptualizing the people who visit their workshop. When people like Jimmy prefer unplanned places to carefully designed ones, what kind of services would they provide and value in the bicycle workshop?

The speculative news report on ‘Plant Hotel at the Border’ presents a form of collaborative service where people help to water and adopt each other’s plants. The speculative case is the continuity of a series of design interventions conducted in my doctoral thesis. As we learn from the fictional scenario, collaborative social relations in services do not only mean mutual help. When a South Korean helps to water or adopt a North Korean’s plants in Plant Hotel, it seems more complicated than mutual help or the survival of plants. Then, by engaging individuals to help others, what meaningful social relations can be created or addressed?

The services of both the bicycle workshop and Plant Hotel belong to one type of service which people deliver among themselves, bypassing institutional and monetary mechanisms. The primary character of this type of service is that people act as capable agents to contribute, rather than as customers to be served. The second important characteristic is related to the social relations that are generated from people working for and with each other. It means the active agency of participants and rich social relations play crucial roles in the completion and the quality of services. We can call it a service of ‘conviviality’, in Ivan Illich’s term (1973), and collaboration. This is the subject of investigation in this doctoral thesis. It is initially influenced by Manzini’s (2015) proposal of designing with ‘creative communities’ in the framework of designing for social innovation, and follows and contributes to the agenda of designing for a society of conviviality and collaboration where people actively involve themselves towards fulfilling their daily needs.

The core research question is:

**How can service design create opportunities for people to contribute to and with each other as capable agents and develop meaningful social relations?**

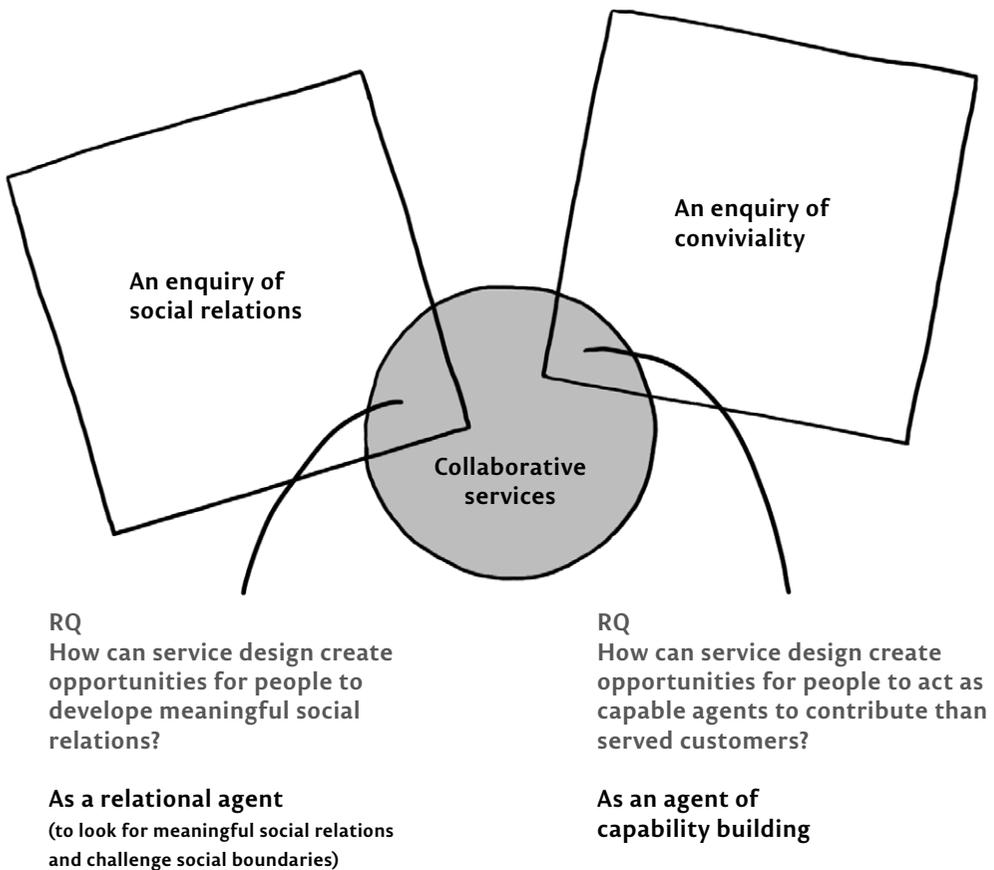


Figure 2: The two aspects of collaborative services investigated in this doctoral work, and the contributions to the two domains, of conviviality and social relations

By addressing this research question, the thesis positions collaborative services as agents of building people's capabilities and also creating new social relations or challenging existing social boundaries (Figure 2). Therefore, the doctoral work intends to explore how service design can contribute to the two domains of conviviality and social relations. The research question indicates two aspects of the type of services of conviviality and collaboration to be investigated. The first aspect examines the active and convivial agency of service participants by asking questions such as 'How is a service of conviviality actually organized and experienced?' and 'How can service design encourage and support people to act as capable individuals?' The second aspect concerns the relational quality and potential of the service, asking 'What meaningful social relations might come out when people work for and with others?' and 'How can service design give opportunities for people to develop meaningful social relations?'. In order to answer these questions, the thesis investigates two cases in the Nordic context, mainly in the capital city of Finland, Helsinki. The first case is an existing service of a self-repair bicycle workshop run by a subcultural group of which Jimmy is a member. The second case is a series of design interventions called Plant Hotel that I conducted. Plant Hotel is a service concept, inspired by the service ethos in the self-repair bicycle workshop, which creates a platform where people can help water other's plants.

Different from commercial bicycle repair shops, the bicycle workshop studied in this thesis provides free resources and help so that visitors are able to build and repair their bicycles by themselves. The service is organized to support and strengthen people's capabilities in bicycle repair. Such a service, therefore, can be considered a service of conviviality. The study takes a hard look at how this service is actually organized and experienced. It investigates, from the volunteers' perspective, their way of understanding a good service and how they articulate these values in mundane practices, and on the other hand, from the visitors' perspective, how the workshop is experienced, especially by newcomers who are used to commercial services. The findings show in detail how the group treat visitors as capable and knowledgeable individuals who want to have autonomous control over their repair work rather than as dependent customers. Instead of providing services to make visitors' repair work faster and easier, the group insist on leaving adequate space for people to struggle and negotiate in the repair process.

The study of how the bicycle workshop contributes to designing for conviviality is not done through providing direct design methods or guidance. Rather, these ethnographic findings contribute by detailing and deconstructing the abstract concept of ‘conviviality’ into concrete, situated, and mundane materials, practices, and experiences. For instance, the workshop visually appears to be a ‘dump’ filled with piles of spare parts, far away from the aesthetics of modern consumption like cleanliness and decent refinement. However, these odds and ends support more participation and creativity in bicycle repair and building (Section 3.3). Taking another example, some visitors complain the group of volunteers do not appear friendly or welcoming, while others appraise the volunteers as leaving adequate space for freedom and autonomy (Section 3.4). Both reveal the way in which the service of conviviality is experienced materially and socially. The study argues that only by carefully examining how a convivial place is produced are we able to understand and further design for conviviality. These findings concerning this marginal case and subcultural group lead to another contribution. By revealing the differences between designing for enabling people and for serving customers with the case of bicycle services, it provides a fresh eye to re-examine some taken-for-granted service design assumptions, especially the construction of users, and how they might face a challenge or even resistance in a place of conviviality. It indicates the necessity of (critically) digging into the values some service design assumptions articulate and the agency of users they hypothesize.

Having learned about the service ethos in the bicycle workshop, I develop a service concept called Plant Hotel where people have a chance to water other’s plants. I conduct Plant Hotel in four different social settings targeting different social groups. Through the design work, I discuss how service design can support and stimulate people, like passers-by or elderly customers, to become capable agents who are able to offer help, for instance, watering another’s plants in my case. Furthermore, I explore what meaningful social relations can be designed for from the collaborative care for plants. From my interventions, I realize that the new social relations can be more than mutual help and do not need to serve merely the completion of services. As I have illustrated in ‘Plant Hotel at the border’, meaningful social relations can be related to a political statement that challenges the border issue. Therefore, as a contribution, the thesis delineates a methodical position of design engagement with social relations (Chapter 6), addressing the research

question ‘How service design can provide opportunities for people to develop and negotiate with meaningful social relations in daily lives’. It is built on established design practices with public and discursive orientations that design can help to articulate social issues rather than merely suggesting solutions. This means the new social relations to be designed are no longer about a solution to problems or a preferred and improved model to promote. Rather, they function as a provocative dialogue that allows participants to reflect, look for, and debate about meaningful social relations through direct engagement with the constructed service.<sup>1</sup> When people encounter new possibility in their daily social setting, they develop ways of interpreting and interacting with the new service which they find meaningful. Through these practices, participants critically negotiate with the new possibility in the intervention (‘How meaningful can the new possibility be or not?’), as well as critically reflecting on the existing social relations (‘What should be changed and what not?’). Thus, by being attentive to the emerging and current characters of social relations, this position is committed to both the speculative and reflective dimensions.

Approaching the enquiries, the thesis uses ethnographic observation. Ethnographically studying services indicates an anthropological orientation, which locates service in the enquiry of social practices instead of in the field of management or engineering. The study of the bicycle workshop is a piece of ethnographic research on a marginal social world, asking ‘What’s going on?’ In Plant Hotel, the ethnography is conducted in the field of the intervention, asking ‘What is emerging?’ and ‘What is challenged?’ The mode of ethnography of design intervention is implied by the design anthropologic framework (Section 6.4). The former takes an interpretive approach and the latter a constructive one. I also use micro-sociological studies of symbolic

interactionism and ethnomethodology as analytical tools to study human interactions (Section 2.2).

The rest of this chapter discusses the context of the topic and dives deeper to the subject and research questions, and Chapter 2 the method. Chapter 3 presents the study of the bicycle workshop.<sup>2</sup> Chapters 4, 5, and 6 constitute the interventions of Plant Hotel, with Chapter 4 about

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘constructed service’ is developed from the Situationists’ approach of ‘constructed situation’ (Debord, 1981). This is defined as ‘the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality’ (n.p.). The approach aims to liberate people from the alienating effect of capitalism by using creative, playful, and artistic tactics. Examples are *détournement* and *dérive*. In my thesis, Plant Hotel is seen as a ‘constructed service’ deliberately constructed with the rules that challenge the normative orders of the intervened-in social setting and suggest new possibilities.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 3 is written as the extension of a published book article, ‘Nothing makes sense!’. *New aesthetics of experiences in self-organizing services* (Wu, Whalen, & Koskinen, 2015).

the first Plant Hotel, Chapter 5 five Plant Hotels that respectively discuss five social relations, and Chapter 6 a proposed position of design in the relational field.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2. Manzini's Manifesto: An Approach of Locality Towards a Radical Change

In 2011, when I started my doctoral research, I was largely influenced by the Italian design educator and theorist Ezio Manzini. I understood little of his lecture I attended in 2011. I only remembered he said, '*You might find it weird why industrial designers are doing something relating to farming*'. Then he continued that designers can no longer only design desirable products to sell and should figure out something else better to do. My doctoral research started with this brave and radical move that attempted to take design to a new field. This new field is designing for social innovation, in which Manzini represents one significant force in both theory and practice.

In this section, I will give a brief introduction to design for social innovation as a prominent contemporary design attempt to decouple design from consumerism and commit to the broader well-being of humans and society. In the beginning of my doctoral study, following Manzini's proposal of community-centred design, I found my case, the self-repair bicycle workshop. However, after the ethnographic study, I shifted away from the solution-orientated tradition and the approach of 'redesigning' and embraced the spirit from another design field of critical and speculative design (more discussion in Section 3.5). Although my work does not share the strategies and methods that most designers use in the field of design for social innovation, this field of work has influenced my doctoral work in two aspects: the concern with complex social issues and phenomena, and the method of concrete intervention with local communities. Therefore, I have no intent to go deeply into this field. Instead, I will introduce the conditions in which this contemporary design discourse is emerging and the approach of locality by stating three aspects that I have found the most inspiring.

The new practice of designing for social innovation starts with a deep concern that the world is in crisis. Social innovation argues that society is facing

<sup>3</sup> Some paragraphs in Chapters 4 and 5 are revised from a published conference paper, *Plant Hotel: Service as a relational agent* (Wu, Koskinen, Lee, & Whalen, 2015)

various complex economic and ecological problems. Humans are consuming too many resources and the planet's limit will be reached. Consumerism leads to a problematic mainstream conception of well-being, which is built on excessive and enthusiastic consumption of products. The more artefacts an individual possesses, the more well-being they seem to have. This encourages people constantly to pursue more products. Such unlimited exploitation of planet's limited resources is considered wrong. These problems are seen as more complex and huge in scale than ones in the past (Rodin, 2013, p. 4). To handle these 'new' challenges, social innovation literature argues that current top-down and market-based approaches of operations are no longer enough action (e.g. Bovaird, 2007; Murray, Caulier-Grice, & Mulgan, 2010). New social models should not be solely technologically or economically driven based on mass production or mass consumption. Social innovation aims more to create new ideas that meet social needs and enhance societal capacity to act collaboratively (Murray, et al., 2010). Therefore, more bottom-up approaches are needed, where various social forces, encompassing public sectors, enterprises, entrepreneurs, NGOs, educators, researchers, and communities, should have open discussions and contributions to new ideas and solutions to increase society's capabilities. Design has become one of the active forces in social innovation. However, design, as a discipline born to serve industry, has to reinvent itself in order to play an active role in engagement with societal problems (Margolin, 1998; 2002).

Actually, design has a long history of an interest in decoupling itself from consumer culture and committing to broader societal and ideological development. During the economic recession in the 1970s, designers were active in suggesting alternatives to mainstream living, including notable pioneers like Jane Jacobs in urban activism (1961), Victor Papanek in socially responsive design (1971), and Ernst Friedrich Schumacher in the appropriation of technologies on a local and small scale (1973). Usually, these design movements gain more stimulus and attention during the economic and social challenge of austerity (Armstrong, Bailey, Julier, & Kimbell, 2014).

However, Manzini makes a clear distinction between his proposal and other proposals of designing for change. He argues it is no longer enough to have incremental improvements like 'green design' within market mechanisms that his predecessors, like Victor Papanek (1971), used to propose. He insists that the change needs to be so radical that 'everything that belonged to the mainstream way

of thinking and doing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century will have to be reinvented', including the whole of 'everyday life', 'the very idea of well-being', and 'the large socio-technical eco-systems' (2016, p. 53). Therefore, new forms of production and consumption of goods and services outside the conventional market and state service modularity are urgently needed. Future everyday life will have to consume fewer environmental resources and should be a society where individuals actively and collaboratively respond to their daily needs.<sup>4</sup>

In order to achieve a future that is radically distinctive from current systems, what are the concrete radical ways of doing and living in terms of food, housing, mobility and other daily affairs to achieve a better future? How can design contribute to the change? Manzini proposes that we should look for the answers to 'Change towards what?' in local communities and their everyday practices, and designers can redesign the existing forms of production and consumption for a larger impact.

In the design field, Manzini's approach to redesigning represents a shift on designers' role in future visioning, innovation, and making change. By starting with existing ways of production and consumption initiated by local communities, the emphasis of the designer's role is put on 'redesign' when 'everybody designs', rather than the sole or main innovators (Tonkinwise, 2010).

Moving to the more specific, how can design redesign existing models? The first step is to look for existing practices that are however in the margins. Called 'creative communities', they are defined as a group of people who organize themselves to meet daily needs outside mainstream models. It means people are part of the solution, which fits Manzini's perception that people actively and collaboratively meet their own needs without passively relying on market goods and the state (2008). Anna Meroni specifically notes that these communities consciously act to break with mainstream ways of thinking, doing, and living (2007). The promising cases collected in the book, *Creative communities: People inventing sustainable ways of living* (ibid.), are about a group of people who are geographically close and bounded, work collaboratively to grow food, build houses, exchange skills, lend and borrow tools, take care of children, and many other daily affairs.

However, these 'creative communities' alone are not enough to make a change. Hypothesized as 'seeds', the practices initiated by grassroots communities are weak, fragile, and

<sup>4</sup> He repeatedly describes a simplified and romanticised scenario throughout his writings. This is one early piece: 'we need to re-discover the pleasure of moving on foot, of eating local fruit, of feeling the cycle of the seasons, of caring for things and places, of chatting with neighbours, of taking an active part in the life of the neighbourhood, of gazing at the sunset, and so on.' (2006, p. 13)

isolated, and, consequently, need strategic and structural methods and actions to lead to macro transformation. Therefore, it is expected that design can play a significant role in 'growing weak seeds'. This approach refers to the two main phases proposed in social innovation literature. The first phase is the ideation of new ideas on a local scale and the second emphasizes the processes of adoption and diffusion on a larger scale (Biggs, Westley, & Carpenter, 2010). Design contributes to both phases by focusing on the local while committed to the larger change.

As one prominent attempt, the DESIS Network (design for social innovation and sustainability), initiated since 2009 by Manzini, explores how designers can be engaged with local initiatives to lead to a larger societal change towards a sustainable future. Having developed more than 40 DESIS Labs covering five continents, this active design research community has bravely experimented with various kinds of intervention with local communities and continually critically reflects and shares with each other at talks and conferences. In 2015, Manzini published a book, *Design, when everybody designs: An introduction to design for social innovation*, as a summary of his research during the past several years with illustrations from some successful design projects from the DESIS Network (2015). Aside from the design research network initiated from the Milan school, the United Kingdom is also another pioneering centre in the exploration of design engagement with societal change and human progress, like the active players of Live|work Studio, the Young Foundation (e.g. Thackara, 2007), Nesta (e.g. Murray, 2009), and the RED team in the Design Council (e.g. Cottam & Leadbeater, 2004).

Working in the first phase, design practices are carried out at a localized level, through which designers closely work with real people (their needs and capabilities) in the everyday context. Various new design methods have been experimented with during the past few years to explore all possible values of design in community-led innovation processes. To list a few, design can enable, facilitate, and enhance local creativities through co-design tools; create strategic dialogues among different actors and cultures (Franqueira, 2009; Manzini, 2010; Winschiers-Theophilus, Bidwell, & Blake, 2012); experiment with quick prototypes within the context to articulate, test, and develop new ideas (Cantù, 2012; Hillgren, Seravalli, & Emilson, 2011); scale up and replicate the seed in other social contexts and group (Manzini & Rizzo, 2011; Meroni & Sangiorgi, 2011). High-quality

design projects often include the two essential elements of designers' long-term commitment and shared investment with local members.<sup>5</sup>

While designers are actively engaged with a bottom-up locus, there is also another group of designers focusing on the second phase of 'amplifying seeds' in social innovation. By recognizing the limits of the locality orientated method, they use more systemic strategies to bridge the top-down and bottom-up better and reach a broader impact (e.g. Armstrong, et al., 2014; Chen, Lu-Lin, Hummels, & Koskinen, 2016). For instance, Johansson and Woodilla (2008) are developing the strategic management of building long-term partnerships with various stakeholders in order to take steps more effectively. The 'Transition design' programme at Carnegie Mellon University attempts to get designers better equipped for the interrelations of complex social, economic, political, and natural systems (Irwin, Kossoff, Tonkinwise, & Scupelli, 2015). There are also people who work in policy-making in the public sectors (Bason, 2010; Jégou, Vincent, Thévenet, & Lochard, 2013; Staszowski, Brown, & Winter, 2013).

Above, I have briefly listed some design attempts for social innovation. More than a summary, they only reveal a very small part of the large amount of work. As I do not share the same strategies, I will move to the next part, the three aspects relating to future visioning that are the most inspiring and influential for my doctoral work.

Firstly, the new concepts and future scenarios do not originate from top-down policies of governments or theories in intellectuals' writings. They are from the real, flesh-and-blood people, who have needs, emotions, and desires and who need to live, negotiate, and interact. The 'people' are not represented by a number reduced to statistics or conceptualized as part of sociologic or economic models.

It means that these new ideas are created and performed primarily to meet people's specific daily needs. These needs are real rather than theoretical or abstract. This indicates that new ideas promised for a better future should primarily ensure the satisfactory quality of local places and communities. It indicates a practice-led approach where new meanings emerge from what people do in everyday life rather than what people think in an academic way

<sup>5</sup> Three cases in which designers have achieved great success through long-term commitment.

*Malmö Living Labs* (2010-2014), from the Swedish Participatory Design community, building platforms to facilitate social innovation in neighbourhoods in the city of Malmö (Björgvinsson, Ehn, & Hillgren, 2010; Emilson, Hillgren, & Seravalli, 2014; Hillgren, et al., 2011);

*Feeding Milan. Energies for change (Nutrire Milano. Energie per il cambiamento)* (2009-2014), aiming to establish networks of services of short food chains between the city of Milan and its productive peri-urban countryside based on citizens' unmet demand for high quality and fresh food (Cantù, 2012);

*Project H* (2008-ongoing), an NGO outside the academic context, using the power of design to reform local public education programmes to build, amplify, and transform youth communities in Berkeley, CA (Pilloton, 2010).

(Murray, et al., 2010). It echoes the lessons learned from the mistakes of large-scale and top-down projects initiated and run by the state (Scott, 1998) or the purely ideology-driven revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Secondly, the answer to how humans should live varies from community to community and from people to people. It denies the possibility that one single solution can fit all. This bottom-up approach negates a narrow modality of thoughts and embraces the anthropological spirit that acknowledges a pluralistic world where the wisdom and imagination of all peoples flourish and contribute to collective well-being. Furthermore, a pluralistic world has a strong and resilient capability for a sudden change or shock.

The third, a small and implicit point in his writing, is that the inspirations for a better future come from 'home' rather than remote cultural otherness. In the 1920s–30s, Westerners went to primitive societies to look for what they believed the West had lost, including the harmonious relation between man and nature and communal lives (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, p. 129). For instance, Victor Papanek took his students to spend time with indigenous people to learn about low-tech making. Following this trend, design schools went to developing societies or remote villages to seek alternatives to mainstream modes of production (Clarke, 2011). However, there is a challenge in transferring or implementing a model originating from a different social setting into the domestic context (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, p. 116). It is easy to have a romantic and static picture of the exotic, especially when it is seen removed from its full social and economic context (p. 159). Now, Manzini asks his colleagues and design researchers to look for alternatives 'at home', in the neighbourhood, the next block or in a nearby village. Most of the cases collected are from the researcher's city, even the metropolis areas (Meroni, 2007).

In this section, I have presented the inspiring parts of the design proposals and practices of Ezio Manzini and his colleagues. In the next two sections, I will introduce how I develop my enquiries from Manzini's manifesto to the investigation of the type of services of conviviality and collaboration. Moreover, I dive deeper to the two aspects of conviviality and social relations.

## 1.3. Conviviality in Services

Active agency indicates a distinctive role of service users from the conventional business and commercial mode. The ‘user’ is not a customer to be served. Instead, they are active in producing the service. This mode is called by Manzini (2008) ‘collaborative services’, in which people collaboratively organize themselves towards fulfilling their daily needs instead of relying on the third parties as service providers. Thus, the needy ‘users’ also become part of the solutions. There are many cases of collaborative services in the fields of food production, accommodation, or mobility. Take a simple service of mobility as an example: responding to the need that children move between home and school daily. There are two modes: the conventional school bus and the collaborative ‘walking bus’. The school bus is a normal vehicle and the picking-up service is provided by the school and operated by an employed driver. The ‘walking bus’ is comprised of children and one or two parents who walk together with the children. It is a solution that parents provide to themselves through their social network. In the fields of accommodation and ageing, co-housing has been recognized as a promising solution for the need of ageing living (Hanson, 2000; Williams, 2005). The central idea in this model is that a group of elderly citizens actively take care of each other in their daily affairs, including designing the houses, catering, cleaning and socializing. Co-housing sites often feature large communal spaces to support collective activities of the self-managed residential community.

It has been widely argued that it is important that people actively take care of themselves in regard to their daily needs of eating, dwelling, or moving, rather than outsourcing largely to commercial products, services, and the state. The arguments relating to DIY ethics and self-reliance are concerned with these main aspects of power and control mainly between commercial institutes and individuals, ecological issues of energy and material use, and intellectual rewarding of individuals as opposed to the alienated, fragmented, and restrained self.

Here, I introduce an important concept relating to the active agency of individuals in collaborative services. This is ‘conviviality’, a term coined by the philosopher Ivan Illich (1973), who proposed an alternative to the industrial and institutional control of tools by suggesting rethinking the relations between man and his tools. To live, man needs to develop and use tools to meet needs. Illich observed that

in the industrial society, tools are developed to meet the expansion goal of industrial production and commercial profits instead of enabling individuals. By promoting the process of professionalization, institutions gain a monopoly on accessing tools and resources. Consequently, this constrains individuals' capabilities of doing things by themselves, and in turn, they have to rely on institutions. Tools are developed to become manipulative that individuals have little control over, which further lead to individual creativity being deprived and only consumption options remaining. Illich gives an example of the medicines industry. It centralizes the power in medical professionals and makes people harder to care for themselves and their families. Another example is that Ford cars are designed to constrain users' participation in repair when their cars break down. The repair work can only be done by mechanics trained and employed by Ford.

Illich, thus, proposes an alternative to the industrial and institutional mode of production. It is a convivial mode, aiming to give more power and control to individuals over their tools. Convivial tools are developed and used to serve the well-being of individuals and communities rather than institution-defined values. They should enhance, rather than deprive, people's imagination, autonomy, and liberty. What characterizes a convivial tool? Illich says it should be easily and equally accessible to everyone. Its use should not be constrained or decided by other people or institutions. As a result, individuals are able to use tools to pursue their own goals in a personal manner and taste. He believes a society with the contribution of more autonomous individuals, who can decide what they need and how to respond personally, will have a more effective mode of production. Convivial tools range from hand tools like pens or hammers, to technological devices like telephones, and further extend to larger 'tools' like the library. Illich has provided guidance for actions to design and develop technologies. Examples of designing for conviviality include: Stewart Brand's magazine (1968–1972), *Whole Earth Catalog*, providing 'access to tools' so that people can 'find his own inspiration, shape his own environment, and share his adventure with whoever is interested' (Brand, 1981); Lee Felsenstein's development of personal computers; and the recent *Fablabs* providing open access to machines for digital production.

After reviewing the power relation between institutions and individuals, we look at the conceptualization of consumers or users from the design perspective. Illich claims that in a non-convivial society professionals including designers decide for people what they

need and what solutions to take. Products and services are designed and delivered in a manner minimizing people's personal involvement. For instance, a 'smart home' automation system is designed to make people's domestic life easier and efficient, like the functions of heating the bedroom automatically or reminding about expired milk. However, on the other hand, it means that, by requiring the least attention, physical effort, time, and capability from users, the system separates them from daily affairs that would otherwise be managed by themselves. Manzini calls this the 'disabling solution', which 'reduce[s]' user involvement and sequester[s] formerly widespread knowledge and skills to integrate them into technical devices' (2006, p. 11).

We need to change a society where individuals are left little space to take care of themselves, of each other, and of the surrounding environment. What should designers do, then, to contribute to achieving a society of conviviality? How can designers support and strengthen people's capabilities? What needs to be changed in the construction of 'users'?

I am seeking answers in a self-repair bicycle workshop characterized by a service of conviviality.<sup>6</sup> First of all, the bicycle can be considered a convivial tool according to Illich's definition (more in Section 3.1.1). This simple piece of technology is easy to access, use, and hack. Based on the basic structure, individuals can add different parts for their own purposes. Secondly, this bicycle workshop supports and promotes bicycle repair and building activities by providing the necessary materials of tools, spare parts, and space, as well as advice. Sometimes, they also organize self-building workshops for exchange students and refugees. As a result, this enhances people's independence of mobility. Thirdly, the community position themselves as a subcultural group, embracing a strong resistant stance against mainstream cultures of consumerism and the car culture of excessive

mobility. By supporting people with mechanical skills, the workshop intends to liberate them further from the constraints of formal models of industrial production and consumption. Therefore, I consider this workshop to be a service of conviviality that serves the capabilities, power, and autonomy of individuals in mobility. Moreover, this service is operated with the integration of resources from various individuals.

<sup>6</sup> I would like to add a few lines to explain the use of the theoretical concept of 'conviviality' although it did not emerge from the community members. In the beginning of my doctoral thesis, I was looking for 'creative communities', defined by Anna Meroni as a group of people who organize themselves to meet daily needs collaboratively outside mainstream models. The bicycle workshop that encourages self-repair and operates bypassing the monetary system fits the requirements well. During the fieldwork, the languages and categorization used by the members were 'punk-cyclists', 'DIY', and 'anti-passivity'. When I was analysing the field data, I learned about Illich's term 'conviviality'. I found the term well-characterized the practices and ideology of the community, given the three reasons presented in the following texts. Furthermore, I decided to use the term to frame the research question.

It gathers people who have mechanical skills and spare time to spend, who have spare parts to donate, and who are eager to learn and enjoy bicycle repair and building. It identifies these capabilities and integrates them well to switch on people as valuable contributors successfully. They are social members acting in a profound way with knowledge and capabilities to contribute and commitment to be involved in issues anytime when needed.

## 1.4. Meaningful Social Relations in Services

The second characteristic of this mode of service is that the completion and quality of services heavily relies on social relations and interactions among participants. This is called 'relational services' by Carla Cipolla (2009), characterized by the reciprocal relations of participants who produce and share the outcome. It means the boundary between a user and a provider is blurred.

Distinctive from standardized services where the participant is a mechanical part (Levitt, 1976), relational services rely heavily on the quality of the social relations and interactions of the people involved (Cipolla & Manzini, 2009). Taking Plant Hotel as an example, there are various ways of solving the daily problem that domestic plants might die when the owner is away on holiday. Products featuring either some simple fabric or an automatic watering system are available in the market. People through personal connections can help at their convenience. However, Plant Hotel takes the form of collaborative care, in which the survival of plants relies on the collaborative relationship among community members, like neighbours or colleagues.

Another characteristic of relational services is that this form produces two outcomes: the solution to serve needs and new social relations (Baek, Manzini, & Rizzo, 2010). Since the service is produced through interpersonal collaboration, some designers hypothesize it to have the potential to rebuild social bonds and create more social capital that has been lost in modern times (Jégou & Manzini, 2008).

However, a service relying on rich social relations has its frictions.

A self-reliant scenario where your daily affairs are operated by yourself and your tight and small network of family and friends sounds nostalgic. It is an acquaintance-based model. However, when people

live in a city on a much larger scale, the pragmatic functions of strong social ties are replaced by products and services through the market mechanism. People outsource their daily affairs to commercial services to a great extent without the need to know the service providers personally. The trust issue is supported by a contract-based business logic legitimized by state laws. For instance, when visiting a dentist, you do not need to know the dentist personally to trust them. When purchasing gold jewellery in a shop, you do not need to worry the strange salesperson will cheat you. This is the system of 'cooperation without trust' (Cook, Hardin, & Levi, 2005). This simplifies and mechanises the service process with less dependency on interpersonal social interactions. The effect is good and bad. It can be regarded as negative, in the deprivation of social bonds, as well as positive, in the liberation from the complexity of developing and maintaining social networks. There is no clear evidence that tighter collaborative relations in services necessarily lead to stronger community bonds or combat against loneliness. Contrarily, issues like power negotiation, reciprocal obligations, and trust can make people exhausted.

At the same time, the sociologist Eric Klinenberg (2012) in his book, *Going solo*, examined the dramatic increase of urban adult population living in a single household, with the highest rate in metropolitan societies like Stockholm (almost 60%), Manhattan (over 50%), and Tokyo. Some live alone by choice for a life of better quality (especially the young), and some out of constraints (mainly the elderly). No matter why, he claims living solo should be seen as a phenomenon rather than a problem, and the understanding of loneliness needs to change. Living alone does not mean that one feels lonely or disconnected. The single person might spend more time with friends and be active in various social events than the couple. Today, individuals get connected by similar minds rather than kinship. And the freedom of choosing with whom to connect and interact is beyond one's ascribed status.

The sociologist Richard Sennett observes that modern societies are deskilling people in cooperation (2012). Responding to this problem, he proposes an alternative implied by a type of Chinese social relation, *Guanxi* (equivalent to social relations or social network). He emphasizes the high quality of this type of social relation: *Guanxi* is characterized by the ingredients of 'duty' and 'honour', in which 'one feels obligated to prove helpful' (pp. 135-136). However, Sennett (like many Westerners) might not be aware that, as I have observed, in the real Chinese context a large number of Chinese people have

to rely on personal connections (often mixed with economic gift-giving) to access the most basic daily services, like getting a place in a better kindergarten or an appointment at a better doctor. This access is supposed to be equal for everybody. The significant power of individual 'duty' and 'honour' in the social network is based on the dysfunction of formal systems and the dereliction of duty of professionals. The heavy reliance on personal social relations leads to a significant level of inequality, as much as the material inequality that isolates people that Sennett is opposed to. Moreover, Chinese people invest an enormous amount of time, effort, and money in cultivating pragmatic social networks by interacting with selected people. The choice of with whom to interact is not based on whether the person is nice or inspiring to be with, but whether they might be useful one day.

These debates on social relations in services from various perspectives drive me to think further: 'What meaningful social relations do we wish to develop and with whom?' Certainly, this is an enquiry that requires continuous investigation and might not have a closed end or standard answers. Researchers from sociology, psychology, marketing, and even a strand of art can contribute to the investigation of this enquiry. What can design offer in the relational field?

As a design researcher, I approach this topic through constructive investigation. I design a service requiring new social relations to complete, intervene in a real social setting with the constructed service, and observe how local people interact with and talk about it. In my doctoral work, I use one concept of collaborative care for plants and intervene with four different social settings. Involving people in watering other's plants creates opportunities for people to explore what meaningful social relations they wish to create and address in their social context and among themselves. My investigation does not necessarily seek to provide answers. Rather, it functions as a provocative dialogue that allows participants to look for answers through direct engagement with the new possibility. Different from the sociological mode of articulation, design brings matters of concern visible and public for relevant people to discuss, reflect, and negotiate through engagement with the new possibility. Thus, it holds both speculative and reflective aspects, committed to the emerging and current characters of social relations.

Apart from my design practices, the investigation is also influenced by the art practices that are engaged with participation and social relations.<sup>7</sup> The relational field in art is outlined by Bourriaud as follows:

‘[A]rtist sets his sights more and more clearly on the relations that his work will create among his public, and on the invention of models of sociability ... [O]ver and above the relational character intrinsic to the artwork, the figures of reference of the sphere of human relations have now become fully-fledged artistic “forms”. Meetings, encounters, events, various types of collaboration between people, games, festivals, and places of conviviality, in a word all manner of encounter and relational invention thus represent, today, aesthetics objects.’ (2002, p. 28)

Correspondingly, the artwork in the relational field is turning from object ‘forms’ to ‘formation’ of a situation (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 21), from gallery space to specific field sites, from individual authorial creation to collaboration and participation. Some answers we are seeking in the design field have been discussed in the art field for many decades. For instance, what kind of social relations should be produced and for what purposes? Who should be engaged with? How can we evaluate the quality of new social relations being created from the artwork? What should be the relations between the author and the engaged subjects? All these questions are relevant to the design when the aim of design is a piece of social relation or discourse. In Chapter 6, where I delineate a framework of design engagement with social relations, I summarize four types of social relations that

artists argue they create: consensus, antagonism, experience-orientated, and dialogue-orientated, in order to contribute to the discussion on ‘What kinds of social relations should be produced and for what purposes?’ (Section 6.2.1). Moreover, the dual ontological status of artwork that ‘affirms an alternative’ and ‘negates the status quo’ enriches the analytical perspective in the mode of constructive investigation (Section 6.4.3).

<sup>7</sup> The debates I review are mainly from the three art theorists, Claire Bishop, Nicolas Bourriaud, and Grant Kester. I do not include the historical perspective about how debates or arguments have evolved during different historical times. I focus on the recent practices and topics. So far, no singular definition of this type of socially engaged art has been agreed. Various names have been coined with different weights. Nicolas Bourriaud calls them, ‘relational aesthetics’ that art should create new social relations (2002). Grant Kester uses the term ‘dialogic art’ that puts the focus on dialogues and exchange (2004). Claire Bishop uses ‘participatory art’. There are also other names, like ‘community art’, ‘new genre public art’ (Lacy, 1994), and ‘social practices’ (mainly used in the USA). When Pablo Helguera wrote the pedagogical book in this field, he summarized that the definitive element these works all share is the engagement of others in the production of artwork (2011).

## 1.5. The Process of Enquiry 2012–2015

When I started my doctoral programme, I was inspired by Ezio Manzini's bottom-up method of growing promising 'seeds' in the field of social design and innovation (Section 1.2). Following this appeal, I was looking for social groups who were materially and socially actively engaging themselves with daily needs and affairs. I was following six cases: elderly residents who grew vegetables in a residential area without the permission of the local authorities in China (Wu & Gong, 2012); street vendors in a Ugandan village who designed and made their own display artefacts (Wu & Whalen, 2013); a group of rural households who were actively involved with designing and building their new homes when they moved to the city in China; a neighbourhood who regularly organized a market where they sold spare daily objects and food in Helsinki; a bicycle shop that organized craft workshops using spare bicycle parts in Hämeenlinna, a small city in Finland; and the self-repair bicycle workshop run by a subcultural group of punk-cyclists. In the end, I decided only to include the case of the self-repair bicycle workshop in the doctoral thesis, as it provided the richest data and insights and the construction of Plant Hotel was directly inspired by it.

Its name is *Paja*, which in English means 'Helsinki Workshop'. This phenomenon is also called a 'bicycle cooperative' or 'bicycle kitchen'. This type of volunteer-run self-repair project has also been studied by other design researchers from the DESIS Network. It has been collected as one of the cases of 'creative communities' and 'promising seeds' (Cantù, 2012; Meroni, 2007). What makes this study different from other design research is the ethnographical approach. I followed the workshop and people for more than one year. By seriously looking at the most situated and mundane practices and experiences in the social setting, I aimed to disclose 'how a service of conviviality is actually organised and experienced'.

Initially, I approached *Paja* with the hypothesis that they need ameliorative intervention from me, a designer and design researcher. This approach of 'growing seeds' assumes that designers have particular skills and knowledge to lend to the community who does not have them. As I reviewed in Section 1.2, the design space includes finding problems to solve or space to improve, enabling and strengthening local creativities, and amplifying and promoting them to other social groups and places. However, when learning the orders and norms in the workshop, I decided to change the strategy.

Drawing on my data, I started to realize the community's exotic way of understanding and organizing a service. They have distinguished notions, with regard to the use of service, consistency of the service, experiences, and the role of visitors, from those of a business context. Hence, instead of using this piece of ethnography to inform design, I positioned it as a mirror to re-examine normally unexamined design assumptions.

If I had decided there would no design space for me to engage amelioratively with the bicycle workshop, what should I do as a design researcher after studying them? My designerly response was to open a workshop of a similar kind by myself. Inspired by the insights gained from *Paja*, which is related to the active and convivial agency of visitors in services, I intended to open a workshop that was not a place where visitors were served as customers. It should be a service setting where people come to work for others. 'Work' refers to the notion of a capable being with a sense of responsibility and a high level of participation. 'For others' refers to intensive social relations and interactions among participants.

When I was developing the idea of opening a workshop by myself, I met Aoi Yoshizawa, a design student in my school. She was interested in participatory art projects in which people collaborate in art production using the artist's instruments. She was attentive to private stories in people's everyday life. I told her I was interested in engaging people to work for each other in daily services. Then, we decided to collaborate.

Following the fundamental design concept of working for others, we developed several service concepts, like a café where people made coffee for each other, or a place where people washed underwear or ironed shirts together. When we were talking about services related to food, like potatoes, eggs, and salad, we had the idea that people could water each other's plants. We planned to do a series, including the services of coffee-making and washing. However, we decided to try the idea of watering plant first, because, practically, it had to be done in summer and the summer was approaching. Another reason was that we perceived it would be easier to engage people to bring plants, as this idea, at the same time, provided a solution to the daily problem where plants are left without care when the owner is away. We perceived that people who needed help with their plants would be motivated to participate in our project.

We called the service of collaborative care for plants 'Plant Hotel'. It borrows the service metaphor of a 'hotel' in which plants

are 'guests' to be served and humans are 'service staff'. We wanted to open it in a normal place, like a store or café. In the end, we had an offer from a small gallery in the Punavuori area. Punavuori used to be a working-class neighbourhood of sailors, now gentrified into a cutting-edge cultural and design district popular among creative professionals for working and living and tourists for visiting. The principle of the service was that passers-by watered the checked-in plants. Moreover, we made it clear to all participants that we did not take responsibility for the survival of the plants. Our responsibility was rather to construct the setting as a convivial and participatory place where visitors would actively interact with plants.

After constructing the first Plant Hotel, I decided to continue the same concept of plants as the medium instead of the previous plan of subsequent concepts of washing clothes and making coffee. However, I was keen on moving away from the aim of micro-utopian realization, as the persistent practices of forcefully turning visitors into active caregivers was critically self-reflected as an almost didactic attitude (Section 5.1). In addition, at the same time, reading on socially engaged art practices (Bishop, 2012; Bourriaud, 2002) greatly extended my horizons of what social relations can be designed for (Section 6.2). Consequently, I conducted a small experiment right next to my office and in my own community with a strong element of provocation. Opened in front of my professors' office, it challenged the hierarchy between students and professors by inviting professors to help to water their students' plants. After witnessing that the simple act of watering other's plants was able to address directly the aspect of tension in social relations, I gained more interest and confidence in continuing the experiment of Plant Hotel in other social contexts and the discussion of other characteristics of social relations. Soon, when I had a chance to exhibit my work at an academic conference hosted by a design school, I decided to make use of this opportunity to explore how Plant Hotel could address the specific characteristics of social relations emerging from that particular context. After the two small experiments, the next summer I opened the fourth Plant Hotel in two elderly service centres, continuously carrying this open and provocative spirit.

Now, Plant Hotel is a series of design interventions. In this doctoral dissertation, five Plant Hotels are included, four constructed in real contexts and a speculative fifth presented in the Preface (Table 1). They were opened in five different social settings: a neighbourhood in Helsinki (2014), in front of the professors' office in my design school,

Aalto ARTS (2014), an academic conference in Stockholm (2015), two elderly service centres run by the City of Helsinki (2015), and at the border of North and South Korea (speculative 2020).

<b>Plant Hotel</b>						
<b>Social setting</b>	In a neighbourhood gallery, Helsinki	In front of the professors' office, Helsinki	At an academic conference, Stockholm	In two elderly service centres, Helsinki	At the border of North and South Korea (speculative)	
<b>Social relations</b>	How shall we treat our neighbours?	How shall we treat our professors or students?	How shall we treat our guests?	How shall we treat the elderly?	How shall North and South Koreans treat each other?	
<b>Time</b>	27 Jun – 3 Aug 2014	Oct – Nov 2014	4 – 10 Jun 2015	Jun – Aug 2015	2020 (speculative)	
<b>Guest plants</b>	48	2	14	46	43	NA
<b>Plant owners</b>	24	2	13	13	11	NA
<b>Care Givers</b>	70 among 134 visitors	8	over 14	over 8	over 5	NA

Table 1: The Plant Hotel series

As described above, the continuous construction of the series was not pre-planned. The evolving of a new Plant Hotel was influenced by the new findings from and reflections on previous ones. The first and fourth are two substantive empirical cases that were more sufficiently documented and reflected on, while the second and third

served more as a pre-study in the exploration of new possibilities shifting away from the solution-orientated direction. As a result, the two experiments brought more confidence to develop the fourth. Moreover, the fifth at the political border indicates a bolder step that continues to ask what more Plant Hotels can achieve.

As a series, the five interventions investigated five types of social relations with attentiveness to various aspects and characteristics of social relations in five very diverse social contexts. They were conducted in five very diverse social contexts that had little consistent relation with each other. Rather than a systematic development process of a series, the five more show the explorative attempt with the focus on pushing the boundary beyond the instrumental and solution-orientated tradition and towards a more discursive and provocative direction.



# Chapter 2

**Ethnographic Sensibility  
in Service Studies**

## 2.1. Bringing Ethnography to Service Studies: Service Encounters as Social Practices

My doctoral work studies the meanings of active participation and new social relations and interactions in daily services. It brings an ethnographical sensibility to the enquiry of services. Ethnographically studying services indicates an anthropological orientation, which locates service encounters in the enquiry into social practices instead of in the field of management or engineering. This method recognizes the importance that the role of social context plays in understanding and shaping the actions and meanings in services (Blomberg & Darrah, 2015). A service is not an isolated social situation. It is part of daily routines and the social and cultural context. Blomberg et al. argue that what users act and value in a service is better understood from the perspective of what it means to be a local member within the particular social context and group (pp. 176-178). Thus, a service is performed by a group of social actors who enact social identity and produce and reproduce social orders. By recognising the social and contextual nature of service, it can be further realized that service innovation or service design cannot be a perfect process of control from the requirement to the outcome (Sangiorgi & Prendiville, 2014, p. 68). Rather, it is an 'open and fragmentary' process engaging with the emerging quality of social lives (Blomberg & Darrah, 2015, p. 181).

An anthropological orientation is especially insightful when the subject of enquiry is the alternative form of services where rich social relations and interactions play a crucial role in the completion and quality of services. The two cases of services studied in my doctoral work are an existing case of a self-repair bicycle workshop and the series of design interventions of Plant Hotel. The first case exists in a marginal social world, asking 'What is going on?'. The second is the ethnography of the possible drawing on the field of design interventions, asking 'What is emerging?' and 'What is challenged?' The mode of the ethnography of design interventions is introduced in Section 6.4, as part of the new position of design engagement with social relations I propose drawing on in Plant Hotel.

However, my work is not a typical piece of ethnography. The primary aim is not to fully and deeply capture the culture of any localized place solely with the etic perspective. It also aims to challenge insiders' perceptions and provoke new insights through field

experiments and interventions. Moreover, instead of providing an understanding of the place entirely from a native's eyes, the focus is on the encounter between insiders and others. For instance, the case of *Paja* unfolds from how the self-repair bicycle workshop was experienced by outsiders (Section 3.2).

In this chapter, I will present how the practices and social interactions around service encounters will be analysed through the micro-sociological studies of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology.

## 2.2. Micro-sociology: Analysing Social Actions

### 2.2.1. On the basic ideas of ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism

The analysis of the social interactions and practices in the bicycle workshop and Plant Hotel is implied by micro-sociological studies: ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967) and symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986). Both aim to reveal the subjective nature of daily practices and interactions in an everyday situation. Ethnomethodology (EM) studies 'members' methods', to understand how local members *in situ* use common sense knowledge and practical skills to make the social setting accountable. By giving serious weight to the very detail of daily practices, it does excellent work on revealing taken-for-granted common senses that local members use to construct the orderliness of the social situation. The central concept in symbolic interactionism (SI) is that meanings are derived from the social interactions between people. Theoretical discussions of the synthesis, distinctions, or critique of the two bodies are not the interest of my work, as mine is not a piece of sociological study. I am not concerned with the different treatments of meanings or different understandings of the nature of interactions, like some sociologists are (e.g. Dennis, 2011; Denzin, 1969). What matters is the methodological individualistic perspective that provides important theoretical foundations and tools for my analysis. I briefly introduce the two main methodological positions that I find inspiring and relevant to my work.

Firstly, both argue that society exists in action and should be understood in action, answering how the social order is achieved.

The ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel states that social fact is the product of social members' organized daily activities and interactions,

'...[T]he objective reality of social facts as an ongoing accomplishment of the concerted activities of daily life, with the ordinary, artful ways of that accomplishment being by members known, used, and taken for granted [...]' (1967, p. vii)

SI is also based on this idea that it is the on-going activities of individual actors that establish and portray social structure. SI argues that any social institute or group, like a family, a church, a hotel, or an elderly service centre, does not function automatically by itself based on some inner rules. It functions because of the on-going achievement of local practices by various local members at different points (Blumer, 1986, p. 19). Any concept of social structure, like the social role of being a consumer or an older person, norms, or conventions, is meaningless unless it is seen regarding the concrete action that individuals undertake (p. 55). Social structure only has meanings that individual actors assign to them. And the meaning is not given, but produced through the interaction.

Secondly, the actor is seen as a self-conscious organism who actively constructs its action instead of merely responding to pre-existing rules imposed on or operated through it (pp. 15, 53). They form lines of action when they interpret and identify the situation, objects, and other actors they encounter. It is a formative process where the actors constantly check, bend, and revise the actions. In a situation, the actor has to note various things, take necessary things into account, interpret and assess them, and form a line of action. The various things include their aspirations and wants, the action goal, the material objects, the available resources and means for their achievement, the presence and actions of other actors, their self-image performance, and the likely result of a given line of action. The formation of action is through such a process of indication and interpretation of a situation (pp. 15-16). Social structure, like values, rules, and norms, does not determine practices. Rather, it provides conditions for actors to refer to, select, judge, sustain, reinterpret, or transform when they produce their own actions. Actors do not act towards social structures or alike (p. 86). They act towards the situation that they interpret and reinterpret.

Then, you may ask why social norms always appear stable. Social norms are established on regularized and stabilized practices

and knowledge socially standardized by local members. Collective individuals with shared common knowledge routinely produce and maintain stable features of society. However, the repetitive and regular behaviour of members does not mean that the on-going process of interpretation does not exist or is fixed. It is under constant interpretation and re-interpretation in the daily situation. The self-conscious and self-directing features are not obvious because of their ready-made and commonly accepted definitions at the hand of the routinized daily situations (p. 86).

### 2.2.2. 'Breaching experiments' in the study of the bicycle workshop

As a result of the rules that govern behaviours being so taken-for-granted and invisible, Garfinkel (1967) uses the ethnomethodological means of 'breaching experiments' to reveal them by disturbing routine action flows. 'Breaching experiments' are the penetration of normal situations of interaction to uncover taken-for-granted rules. The experiment is typically phrased with respect to how one could disrupt normal social events so that any person's conception of the normal, real, and ordinary would be challenged (Ibid.).

This method informed my study of *Paja*, where I tried naturalistic field 'experiments' with the intention to disrupt some normative social actions in service encounters. Apart from ethnographically observing people who were already familiar with the particular social situation of *Paja*, I took eight bicycle users to the workshop to repair their bicycles. None of them had heard about the place or been to somewhere similar. Three had some experience with basic repair skills, while the other five had none. As their usual way of getting a bicycle repaired was to pay a professional mechanic in a shop, they were quite familiar with the rules and orders of business services and had formed a background expectancy concerning them. In this sense, bringing them to a bicycle workshop with a different order and not giving any prior explanation or introduction, was meant to breach their social expectations of services. That is to say, exposed to the unfamiliar scenes, they had to construct meanings of the place that were completely new for them. Like any naïve and first-time visitors to a social setting, they had to attempt to make themselves comfortable and culturally acceptable and avoid deviant behaviours or negative experiences. In order to achieve this, they needed to contextually transform and modify their background understandings and

expectancies, and their previous knowledge and experience relating to services and repair work. They necessarily assigned meanings and determine relevancies to the new social situation that decidedly 'breached' their expectations of a service encounter, and decided what actions were then operative and normative. At the same time, workshop volunteers, who are the insiders of this cultural place, had to face outsiders who might produce actions that 'breach' the insider's normal expectations and routines. During this encounter between outsiders and insiders, what ordinary and taken-for-granted mean on both sides was rendered visible. Thus, by analysing the situated actions and experiences of both sides during the 'breached' moments, I seek to reveal the 'invisibility of common sense' (ten Have, 1990), those unspoken rules that govern people's behaviours and experiences relating to both commercial and convivial services.

### 2.2.3. Analysing emerging practices in Plant Hotel

In this section, I present how micro-sociological perspectives can contribute to the investigation of change and emergent practices with the demonstration of how I will analyse the field data from Plant Hotel.

First of all, micro-sociologic studies provide a general understanding of society that is in a state of flux and dynamics. The social factor or any matter is not fixed, unlike how Structuralism sees society. Society is not glued where everything is held together in stable and orderly relationships. Rather, society becomes subject to the formation of workable relations. This perspective is inevitably concerned with the changing and emerging texture of society and actions.

Secondly, it provides an important methodological perspective on the study of change. As society exists in action, any social change necessarily involves a change in human action. And human action is formed in the process of the interpretation of daily situations. Herbert Blumer suggests it would be wise to recognize any social change is mediated by the actor interpreting the situation they are dealing with (1986, p. 89). Thus, in order to study the possible, it is vital to trace carefully how emerging practice is actually formed in the new situation. Facing a new situation, actors will necessarily find it problematic or existing rules inadequate. They have to develop a new definition of the situation based on the resources they can note, grasp, and interpret. A group of actors have to negotiate to work

out new ways of acting that can fit each other. These new definitions and meanings that are created may enter into the repertoire of existing meanings and values. This is the way in which new practices and relations are formed (p. 133). If the new action and experiences become stable and repetitive, and recognized and shared by local members, new social rules and norms will be further established.

Thirdly, the analysis of the formative process of a new form of action contributes to the understanding of emerging practices.<sup>8</sup> From the last paragraph, we can learn that any new form of action is derived from modification and redirection when actors reinterpret the world of objects and the stable meanings that objects already possess. Thus, a new action is not a breakdown of the existing system or a result of unrelated facts playing on the established norms. It is a continuous process (pp. 76-77). We cannot understand the new form without incorporating the knowledge of existing ones into the analysis of the new (p. 20).

Plant Hotel was constructed as a situation with new rules intervening in a social setting with its existing stabilized and routinized patterns. I reconfigured the materiality of the place and pre-set service rules to promote and support new forms of action, new social roles, and a new model of social relations. For instance, along the urban street, there is a place where passers-by have a chance to water a neighbour's plants. Or, in an elderly service centre the elderly visit to be for their personal well-being to be taken care of, there is a place where they have a chance to give care and help others. Plant Hotel constituted a change in routinized behaviours. If precisely not a change, it constituted a chance to perceive a possibility of a change or reflections on habitual behaviours. However, we cannot determine actions or meanings. Instead, we provide conditions where actors develop their own actions through interpretation and re-interpretation of the existing social normalities and the new rules.

<sup>8</sup> This analytical point is closely related to the mode of enquiry of ethnography of design interventions that I will discuss in Section 6.4.

What existing meanings got  
sustained?  
strengthened?  
weakened?  
questioned?  
changed?

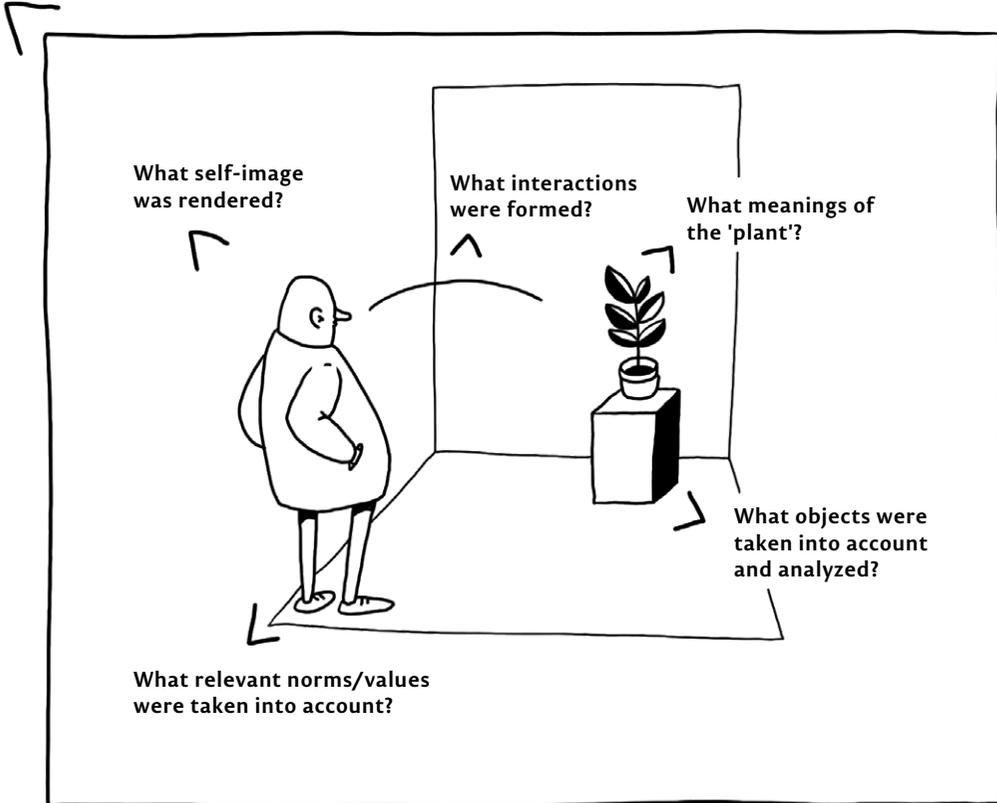


Figure 3: Analysis of the formation process of action when an individual encounters the situation of Plant Hotel

In Plant Hotel, 'another person's plant' as an object was seen as a medium with relevance to social relations. According to SI, any object does not have fixed status (Blumer, 1986, p. 11). Its meaning is only sustained through the indication and interpretation process which actors assign to the plant. Objects are social creations through the process in which a meaning is formed, learned, maintained, and transformed. Accordingly, 'another person's plant' would carry different meanings derived from different forms of interaction in different social contexts. Certainly, the staging of the presence of plants can be designed and arranged. In my analysis of the five Plant

Hotels, the meanings of the ‘plant’ were positioned as the centre. How did I design and arrange the stage of the plants, displaying it as a carrier of personal stories (in Plant Hotel 1), or highlighting the social identity of plant owners (in Plant Hotel 3)? And how did the participants interpret and act? How did this micro-interaction with the plant produce and reproduce the social orders in the intervened-in social setting? All in all, the meaning of another person’s plant is most understood with reference to the relationships among the individuals, the plant, and the social place.

Overall, in Plant Hotel, in order to answer the following enquiries, ‘What can be the meanings of the new social relations for local members’, we should carefully trace **how the (new) action is actually formed** in the constructed situation in which it takes place (Figure 3). When someone encountered Plant Hotel in their familiar daily routines, we need to observe what they took into account: how they defined and assessed the material configuration, how they learned and defined the rules of the situation, what values and norms they considered relevant, what appropriate self-image they rendered for themselves, what alternative types of action they considered, and what, in the end, they chose and executed. In the new situation, what existing meanings are sustained? What meanings are questioned, weakened, strengthened, or transformed? What new meanings are formed?

In the end, it is worth noting that the meanings of the constructed service cannot be determined by designers. We shall see Plant Hotel as a design concept with pre-determined meanings, we shall see it as a result of sets of interpretive processes of action formation by the participants, and the meanings created through the interactions among the participants and between the participant and the objects. The relevant analysis is in Section 4.3, ‘Plant Hotel as a showroom of authentic stories’, showing how the meanings of Plant Hotel were co-constructed by the designers, caregivers, and plant owners.

## 2.3. Collecting Data

In 2012 when I started my doctoral study, I was looking for social groups who materially and socially actively engaged themselves with daily needs and affairs. I found *Paja*, the volunteer-run self-repair bicycle workshop, when I met a guy who recommended *Paja* in

a mysterious tone, '*they are doing really cool stuff in a basement*'. The keywords 'really cool stuff' attracted me to decide to pay a visit to find out what cool bicycles they were building. Later, I realized what this guy meant by 'really cool stuff' was more than just self-built bicycles with different shapes and styles from the mass-manufactured complete pieces sold in the market. It is also about a 'really cool' way of organizing the workshop that suggests an alternative form of service. Furthermore, I noticed their 'really cool' way of everyday living.

I ethnographically studied the bicycle workshop for about one year. The research had three stages. I approached the bicycle enthusiasts with the primary focus on their material-making: how were the 'really cool' bicycles built? Informed by Elizabeth Shove's theory of practice (2007), I studied the situated knowledge and skills in making and designing practices, and how these practices were supported and framed by the material and social environment. I interviewed eight workshop volunteers and documented the building and updating process of each of their bicycles, including the reasoning, needs, skills, and knowledge. They had had an average of seven bicycles, one with the maximum of 14 and one with the minimum of four.

After that, I developed my enquiry interest to the service that the workshop provides: what are the orders and norms established in this service setting? I visited the workshop constantly, making observations and doing contextual enquiry with visitors and volunteers. With each workshop volunteer, I also conducted semi-structured interviews about their opinions and visions for *Paja*, their understanding of the service they provided, and the customers they served. In order to give them a more visual and concrete picture of customers, I provided 30 personas, asking them to divide into three categories of 'will come', 'will not come', and 'probably'. As a result, they believed '*open-minded*', '*funny*', and '*curious*' people would come, while '*rich*', '*conservative*', and '*busy*' people would not. Although these descriptive words sound like over-simplified tags, the accounts were especially helpful in providing insights into how they culturally and ideologically reviewed themselves. This also revealed their reflective understanding of their resistant relations with the mainstream, which I will discuss in Section 3.5. Apart from the ethnography of the people who became visitors, I took eight bicycle users, who had never been to any similar kind of workshop, to *Paja* to repair their broken bicycles. The eight subjects were all trained in design discipline and were asked to give design proposals after experiencing the workshop for the first

time. These naturalistic field experiments were informed by Garfinkel's 'breaching experiments' (1967) (Section 2.2.2). I followed the subject during the whole process. An interview with each subject was conducted before going into the field and after. Five experiments were video recorded. Two vignettes drawing on the 'breaching experiments' are presented in Section 3.2.

The third stage was attentive to the subcultural identity of the community after I dived deep into their everyday life.<sup>9</sup> I attended punk events they organized to raise funds for *Paja*, LGBT talks organized by female members, and cooking events using dumpster-dived food in a squatted social centre. Meanwhile, in order to capture their perception of a good service of conviviality in the context of conviviality in a broader and deeper sense, I asked them to talk about their favourite places in the city. After the interviews, I visited those places by myself to gain first-hand experiences. The vivid picture of the volunteers' experiences of the urban space helped to understand their values, which I have presented in the Preface, 'meeting Jimmy'.

After studying the bicycle workshop for one year, I was interested in opening a workshop of a similar kind by myself. 'Watering other people's plants' was one of the ideas I and Aoi Yoshizawa came up with. In summer 2014, for one week, we opened the first Plant Hotel in a neighbourhood gallery in the southern harbour of Helsinki. It received 42 plants from 22 plant owners and over 100 visits, and reached more than 4,000 people<sup>10</sup> through the Plant Hotel Facebook page and reports published in the two main local media outlets. I kept diaries of my design considerations and design practices. Throughout the open hours from nine o'clock in the morning to nine o'clock in the evening, I was present in the field, as a member of 'service staff' interacting with visitors and also as a researcher taking field notes on our intervention and visitors' practices. A Go-pro camera was set up inside covering the whole period. The video clips combined with my field notes were analysed later. To each guest plant, I attached one 'storyboard' where the plant owner and caregiver left messages.

These texts were documented. Also, I interviewed 14 out of the 22 plant owners through online questionnaires and emails.

In November 2014 for one and half months, I opened the second Plant Hotel as a small experiment in front of my own professors' office. In order to

<sup>9</sup> The subcultural identity of the workshop might appear obvious for some audiences from the beginning. You might find it strange that I did not realise it earlier. Before approaching the bicycle kitchen, I had little knowledge about underground and subcultural scenes in the West. I only ran into the terms 'punk-cyclists' and 'squatter' very late, when I found their different ways of living drawing on the field work.

<sup>10</sup> The two news articles received more than 4,000 'likes' in total. Therefore, I infer it reached at least 4,000 people.

minimize my intervention and leave the system to run on itself, I made an attempt to be absent from the field. However, I documented all the informal talks I had with the people who approached me to express their thoughts on the intervention. In June 2015 for a week, I opened the third Plant Hotel at an academic conference held in a design school in Stockholm, as part of the conference exhibition. Before the exhibition opened, I collected 14 plants from 12 local members of the school, including students, professors, and other service staff. I asked each plant owner to choose one school to be the caregiver for their plant and to give a reason. The reasons were written on the big wooden board exhibited with the plant and documented as data. During the exhibition, I attended the conference as a normal attendant without being present in the field of the intervention. However, I documented informal talks with 18 people about their thoughts and interpretations of Plant Hotel, including those who directly interacted with plants or not. During the two interventions, I made a choice not to be present so that people could interact with the intervention in their own ways without my interference in the field. It is true that the negative consequence of my absence was the incapability or limitation of collecting field data. Ideally, video cameras should have been set up to document naturally occurring practices from the intervention. Given the practical constraints, they were not. However, it is unfair to blame just practical reasons. I did not set up a camera also partly because I did not think I was missing much if the data on how people interacted with the plants was missing. As the two interventions were constructed as provocative dialogues, the participants' accounts were more important, which were collected from the interviews.<sup>11</sup>

In summer 2015 for almost three months, with the help of Aoi Yoshizawa, I opened the fourth Plant Hotel in two elderly service centres, one of which includes an elderly home with 80 residents. One service centre received 46 plants from 13 plant owners while the other received 43 plants from 11 plant owners. As many informants did not speak English, I got help from two Finnish-speaking researchers who

took field notes and interviewed non-English-speaking participants. In total, we interviewed 16 out of 25 plant owners and the three most active caregivers. I had two meetings with the organizers of each centre, one about planning before and

<sup>11</sup> The second and third Plant Hotels are less well documented compared with the first and fourth. For instance, I did not actively collect students' opinions in the second. I acknowledge the limitation of data collection in the two cases. When I was conducting the two, I treated them as small experiments and did not intend to include them as formal empirical cases in my thesis. However, when I was writing up the process, I decided to include all the cases in order to show the developing process of Plant Hotel more comprehensively.

the other about reflection after. All the meetings and interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Except for one month when I was away from Helsinki for family reasons, I visited the centres once a week and took notes. We arranged registration forms for check-in and -out, an 'info board' attached to each guest plant for people to leave messages, a guestbook for feedback, and a donation-like box for the plant owners if they wanted to give something to the caregivers. The observation of the institute was also part of my enquiry, including how they interpreted the intervention, what existing service rules and structure would be challenged by the new possibility, and how they would adjust themselves or re-orientate Plant Hotel to deal with the discomfort. Thus, I attempted to minimize my participation in the design process and leave as much as space as possible for the institute to design, implement, and adjust.



# Chapter 3

**The Bicycle Workshop:  
A Service of Conviviality**



Figure 4: Visitor building a bicycle based on the spare parts at *Paja*

In *Paja*, people can repair and assemble bicycles by using the workshop's space, tools, and recycled spare parts for free (Figure 4). A group of bicycle enthusiasts voluntarily help people with their repair work. This piece of ethnography answers how this service of conviviality is actually organized and experienced. I examine the bicycle workshop from two aspects of materiality (Section 3.3) and experiences (Section 3.4). The material base of the bicycle workshop is 'junk' and the working means behind it is 'bricolage'. In Section 3.4, given the two pieces of detailed description of how the workshop is experienced negatively by visitors who are used to commercial services, I analyse the values underlying the volunteers' practices, including what distinguished rules and norms have been established, what experiences they find meaningful, what values they embrace and what they do not, and what attitudes and capabilities are required from visitors. In Section 3.5, I present the findings relating to the negative identity formation of the community and the resistant relations it maintains with the mainstream. This finding has implication for Manzini's design proposal of amplifying 'creative communities' in order to have a larger social impact or change. In Section 3.6, based on the findings drawing on the study of *Paja*, I further argue that the marginal case serves as a mirror for defamiliarizing and reflecting the mainstream by using the theoretical position of anthropology as a critique from George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1986).

## 3.1. Background

### 3.1.1. The bicycle, A tool of conviviality

A bicycle is a simple piece of man-powered technology with a history of over 200 years. It can be considered one of the most convivial tools that humans have invented. It always serves more the benefits of individuals and communities rather than institutions. It supports conviviality in two aspects: the means of mobility and production. With regard to mobility, riding a bicycle is based on human capabilities without relying on external energies. Due to the active and constant embodied engagement, it is not surprising that cycling has become a sport or leisure activity through which people increase their physical abilities and gain sensual and emotional enjoyment. It also advocates a self-reliant attitude with less dependency on others like corporations and oil companies. Secondly, the technology is simple to produce and easy to access compared with cars or aircraft. On the one hand, it allows people to fix, build, and modify with their own means and voices. Aside from choosing to consume mass-produced bicycles from industrial factories, people can reuse and recombine spare parts to build new bicycles. Craftspeople can even build and modify frames by welding metal tubes and crafting wood. On the other hand, this makes it difficult for companies to have monopolistic control over production. There are only a few cases where companies produce high-tech bicycles that people have no way to hack or replace parts but choose to become consumers. Otherwise, companies and engineers have no control over whether people decide to customize a bicycle by adding or replacing any part for daily use. For instance, a parent can add a back seat to carry their child, or a farmer can simply use a rope to position two big bags of bananas on the carrier. Moreover, one does not need to get a permit from any institution in order to repair or build bicycles.

The simplicity and easy accessibility of this technology create freedom to a large extent for people to use it in their means for their purposes. It leads the bicycle to become a symbolic icon beyond its utilitarian functions. The bicycle is far beyond an ordinary utility vehicle by which people mechanically move from place A to place B. It is used as a symbolic prop endowed with different cultural and political meanings by different social groups in their particular context. For instance, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the bicycle was used by feminists as an empowering tool to critique and negate women's geographical and

social ‘immobility’ (Macy, 2011). Since the 1960s, cycling has become a performative political statement to criticize the ‘excessive mobility’ of cars in everyday life<sup>12</sup> (Horton, 2010). In addition, for environmentalists, cycling represents a green lifestyle without dependency on fossil fuels (Horton, 2006). Furthermore, bicycle tinkering and hacking is a profoundly sizeable phenomenon in DIY subcultural scenes, as a bicycle is easy to modify and appropriate (Furness, 2010). These self-built bicycles usually look odd and weird based on the reuse of discarded and spare parts, and are called ‘mutant bikes’ or ‘freak bikes’ (Carlsson, 2007).<sup>13</sup> By constantly rethinking and reimaging the functions and shapes of bicycles, bicycle hackers position the bicycle alongside political critiques of the dominant values in formal industrial productions, such as expertise, uniformity, rationalization, utilitarianism, and profit-making (Duncombe, 2002; Furness, 2010).

I have introduced how the bicycle serves a participatory, convivial, and democratic technology, and how it is used as a political approach to social justice, self-empowerment, and alternative to consumption and alienation. Now we look at the social and material environments that support these convivial and autonomous practices. *Paja*, the self-repair bicycle workshop, is one such social formation. There is a vast network of bicycle workshops of this type, volunteer-run and self-repairing, all over the world,<sup>14</sup> called ‘bicycle cooperatives’ or ‘bicycle kitchens’. This social formation with regard to the bicycle has been studied by many researchers (e.g. Carlsson, 2007; Furness, 2010, Chapter 7). Within the well-researched landscape, this study particularly examines the service provided by the workshop, especially from the user’s perspective. It intends to investigate how the community’s way of understanding and operating a ‘good’ service is influenced by their DIY-related values and subcultural identity.

### 3.1.2. The bicycle workshop in a non-monetary system

*Paja* is located in Helsinki, Finland, one of the world’s most economically affluent and technologically advanced societies. Recently, like many other European cities, the local government has been increasingly interested in promoting cycling for daily commuting. In Helsinki,

<sup>12</sup> This political statement can be seen in social movements like critical mass and anti-car protests (Blickstein & Hanson, 2001; Carlsson, 2002; Ferrell, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Regarding this point, in Section 3.3, I will present the working means of the repairing and building practices in *Paja*, bricolage, which is different from the engineer’s scientific means. Further readings are in Chapter 6, *DIY bike culture*, and in Zack Furness’s book, *One less car: Bicycling and the politics of automobility* (2010).

<sup>14</sup> See the website documenting a list of bicycle kitchens in the world: [http://www.bikecollectives.org/wiki/index.php?title=Community\\_Bicycle\\_Organizations](http://www.bikecollectives.org/wiki/index.php?title=Community_Bicycle_Organizations).

there are many types of bicycle workshop, both business and socially orientated. All provide repair and assembly services. Some only sell branded new bicycles, while others also sell second-hand ones. In this society, it is rather expensive to get a broken bicycle repaired in a store, as the labour cost is high. It is around sixty euros per hour, which is sometimes equal to the price of a cheap second-hand bicycle. There are also some alternative workshops. In summer, a newly opened workshop, located in the most central shopping mall, help people to do some simple repair work by lending tools for free. In a local university, a workshop sustained by the student union provides space and resources for students to repair and assemble bicycles. There, a small membership fee is required, and a skilled bicycle mechanic is hired. Due to the city's promotion of urban cycling, recently many short-term pop-up bicycle workshops organized through university student innovation projects have been started.

The one that I am introducing to you is *Paja*, initiated by a group of punk-cyclists since 2011. Before opening the workshop to the public, they frequently gathered to repair and assemble 'crazy' bicycles among themselves in a previously squatted office building, which was later legalized by the *Helsinki Board of Youth Issues* as a 'cultural centre'. After two years, when the building was demolished, the group needed to find a new place for bicycle repair and assembly work. Instead of squatting another place, they decided to rent a space for the bicycle workshop to ensure some relative stability.<sup>15</sup> Thus, they formed a non-profit organization with the promise to teach people repair skills and to promote cycling culture. They applied for funding from the city, and the city granted them a small amount. In the end, they found a basement space in a former factory building in the Vallila area.<sup>16</sup> The group claimed to make the workshop available to the public once or twice per week, and anybody could repair or assemble their

bicycle by using the space, tools, and spare parts.

The most distinguished feature of *Paja* is its rejection of the monetary system. This means that no charge is required from visitors and nobody is hired. Then, how can this workshop sustain itself both economically and materially without money? Their approach is the integration of various spare and free

<sup>15</sup> Squatting is illegal in Finland. If they insisted on squatting, they might face expulsion from the police or property owners at any time.

<sup>16</sup> Vallila is the central northern neighbourhood of Helsinki, north of the city's famous bohemian and culturally liberal area, Kallio. Vallila used to be a working-class neighbourhood and industrial area, and is now becoming popular among both artists and artisans. As Kallio becomes more expensive and mainstream, Vallila is considered the next hub for underground cultures in this capital city. In the building where the bicycle kitchen was located, there were various professionals, mostly relating to creative industries; several wood workshops, artistic studios, some bars that staged live electronic and punk music, and a hair salon that allowed customers to park their bicycles inside.

resources from the affluent society. The first type of free resources, in materiality, includes tools, functional and non-functional bicycles, and spare parts. Some are donated, and others are collected from the trash. The operation of the workshop greatly relies on the circulation of 'junk', the material ecology that I will introduce in Section 3.3. The second free resource is the time and energy of the volunteers from a group of young and unmarried Finnish bicycle enthusiasts. Jimmy is one of them. They are either facing a crisis of employment or have a negative relationship with the standard work ethic. Those who are employed are mostly engaged in manual or handicraft-related labour, such as being boat mechanics, bicycle mechanics, and fine artists. None of these jobs provides high economic or social status. The average working hours per week of this group is much lower than the standard. Without involving themselves in jobs requiring close regulation and intensive work, they have much spare time, of which they can have full control. Although appearing idle, they are busy with activities relating to their interests like cycling, playing in bands, and hanging out at *Paja*, assembling their bicycles and helping others.

However, they still need to pay the rent, even though two-thirds is covered by the grants. The absence of a monetary system requires other approaches to pay the rest of the rent and update the materials of tools and oil. They have formed their ways of getting money: encouraging donation and a membership fee, organizing punk concerts and bicycle-related movie nights to raise money, and selling drinks and food during these events. However, at the same time, they reject other ways, sponsorship from companies and compulsory donations. When the members claim, '*It is uncool to charge money*', they more refer by 'uncoolness' to mandatory or fixed payments.

The absence of a monetary system, at the same time, indicates the importance of reciprocity in sustaining the system. When a visitor uses the space and tools, receives advice, or takes spare parts, they are expected to bring something back to the community. The 'return' can take various forms: immediate cash in the donation box, a spare part from their bicycle, nice company, the sharing of personal stories or experiences, offering help to other visitors, or participating in cycling events later on. Anything, material or immaterial, can be regarded as an appropriate part of the exchange system, all depending on each person's will and capabilities. The exchange is not even based on any formal or informal agreement between the volunteer and the visitor. It will not be measured as equivalent or not, as fairness is hard to determine.

## 3.2. Two Vignettes: Others Encountering *Paja*

The two pieces of ethnographic description present the insights from the naturalistic field experiments informed by Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodological 'breaching experiments' (Section 2.2.2). Apart from studying the visitors who were already familiar with the rules in *Paja*, I was also looking for naives who would encounter *Paja* for the first time. I introduced this alternative repair service to many people, telling there was a place where they could do self-repair work by themselves with the help of volunteers and did not need to pay. Eight people saw it as an acceptable possibility to give a try, while the rest showed no interest either in doing repair work or visiting the place and the people. The two pieces of ethnographic description of Lee and Lisa's experiences of *Paja* are based on the data from the eight subjects and other workshop visitors. I particularly look at negative experiences like confusion, discomfort, and embarrassment. The patterns captured in the two pieces below, such as the difficult social access to the workshop or the inconsistency of the service, were distinct and widely shared by other subjects.

### 3.2.1. Vignette 1 | Lee: '*Nothing makes sense!*'

Lee is a young professional in his early thirties. Allowing me to introduce Lee in a stereotypical way, in terms of consumption, Lee has little to do with any subcultural style. To be more specific, he only purchases products from globally recognized brand corporations, which he believes provide guarantees of functional performance, quality, and aesthetics.

He has a 28-inch all-black Raleigh bicycle, an old British brand, and rides it for commuting during the summer. He bought it from the most prestigious department store in town, Stockmann, which sells well-respected and reliable brands. After riding for two months, there were some noises around the crank and chain parts when he was pedalling. Since there was a one-year guarantee, he took the bicycle directly to the department store without bothering to finding out what the problem was or worrying about the repair price. A sales girl welcomed him. He told her that something had gone wrong, and the girl wrote down his phone number and promised their mechanics would find out the problem and fix it.



Figure 5: When Lee carried the broken bicycle to *Paja*, he found it was closed.

After about one week, Lee received a call from a girl saying his bicycle was ready. The same girl welcomed him. She told Lee happily that they had changed one part and he did not need to pay for it. Now the bicycle was functioning well again without making any noise. It did not matter which part had been replaced, who the technician was, or what they did to Lee's bicycle. Lee was generally content with the service. The service interface was simple, quick, and clean, left all the complicated mechanical work in the backstage and delivered a sense of trust. He thinks this is exactly how a good service is supposed to be that does not require much effort from the customers.

For my research project, I told Lee there was a bicycle workshop where people are taught to repair bicycles and is free. He agreed to join the experiment as he was interested in repair work. When he was a little boy, he sometimes helped his father to repair bicycles. Now grown up, he had not had a chance to do this again. He saw it as a good learning opportunity to regain some basic repair skills. As his bicycle was not broken at that time, I gave him my broken one and asked him to get it repaired at *Paja*.

However, he regretted as soon as he saw the bicycle. It was a second-hand bicycle I had bought from an exchange student. It was a reassembled piece with several parts replaced now and then. The front and rear rims appeared different and the two pedals were



in two shapes and two colours. Many metal parts, like the frame, stem, and some spokes, were rusted. The metal carrier was bent. The front tyre was broken with a couple of fallen dry leaves lying in the gap. He blurted out when he saw it, *'Did you just take it out of the junk?'*

This bicycle brought him an acute sense of embarrassment. He was reluctant to carry it in the beginning,

*'If I knew it was so crappy, I would not agree to repair it. It looks like it is not used or owned by anybody. Otherwise, why it is so rusty? Are you seriously still riding it? It does not have any value.'*

Even later on, when he was convinced to carry it, on the way to the workshop, he was constantly mumbling, *'So embarrassed! People may wonder why this guy is carrying a piece of crap.'*

At the same time, he attempted to convince me of the disadvantage of getting a second-hand bicycle,

*'A second-hand bicycle can be complicated. Because it is not new, you never know when some parts get broken. Then you have to take it to a repair shop. Oh, lots of trouble and lots of money! Life will be so much easier if you get a new bicycle. If it is broken, the shop will repair for you for free!'*

According to his perception of possessed materials, this type of bicycle with the poor functional quality and non-uniform visual language due to the assembly of random parts would definitely not be chosen or considered as valuable, even though it actually functioned. It was different from this all-black Raleigh bicycle with all the parts carefully chosen and manufactured according to a pre-definitive design plan. This 'crappy' bicycle brought unexpected disruptions of his presentation of social self.

Also, it took Lee much longer than what Google Maps calculated to reach the place. Shown on his phone, the workshop was only several blocks away, within 15 minutes' walking distance. Actually, it took him twice that amount of time. The address was in a narrow and hidden street behind a building that he missed several times. Even after he found the address, he had much difficulty in recognizing the entrance. According to his expectations about the entrance of any public or business space, the entrance should appear open, welcoming, or at least recognizable. However, these visual rules did not apply here. There was a metal gate, which was closed and covered with some poor-made graffiti and small posters. Lee was not sure about anything

until he saw an A4-size poster with an illustration of a bicycle, *'It should be here. But where is the door? If it is this, why is it closed? There is no doorbell. What should I do?'*

Luckily, at that time, a man happened to walk out of the door. Lee asked him if there was a bicycle workshop in this building. The man said yes and insisted on taking Lee to the workshop. Inside the building was a storage-like place, dilapidated and dim. Following the man, Lee took the lift to the basement, turned left and right, walked through a corridor, and finally reached the workshop in the basement. But the door of the workshop was closed (Figure 5). They knocked hard on the door but no one answered. The man who had led Lee to the door told him there was a landline phone inside and that the number was on the door. Lee called, and no one answered.

Standing in front of the closed door, Lee was totally shocked. He had no clue how to react to this unexpected situation. This social scene was completely out of his control, beyond his knowledge. His background understandings and previous experiences were not able to allow him to understand why it would happen. Standing there for a while, slowly, Lee said, *'Why is nobody here? It says it opened 20 minutes ago. Do not tell me it is a joke. Nothing makes sense. I want to throw away the bicycle now, so I don't need to repair it.'*

Standing there, Lee appeared totally bewildered. He realized he had experienced such a long uphill journey, through the embarrassment of carrying the crappy bicycle on the street, through the maze of streets in the hidden industrial district. He tried to find some instructions or logic for dealing with this completely unexpected situation, from both his previous experiences and from the situational environment.

He failed.

### 3.2.2. Vignette 2 | Lisa: *'Nobody comes to talk to me!'*

Born in Helsinki, Lisa has been cycling to commute in summer since high school. Usually, when her bicycle has a problem, she takes it to a nearby repair shop. She finds it quite convenient that she only needs to take the bicycle to the professional mechanic even without needing to know the problem. After a week when she receives a call saying her bicycle is ready, she goes to pick it up and pays what the mechanic asks. She does not need to

bother checking the bicycle since she pays to get the professional guarantee.

This time, she found her bicycle was getting heavier and heavier to ride. Unlike her prior situations, Lisa felt it might cost a large amount of money in a repair shop. She kept it in her basement for a long time, until she got to know about *Paja* from a local newspaper, that this was a self-repair bicycle workshop where people could get free help from volunteers with the repair. She decided to give it a try even though she had never been to a similar place or repaired anything by herself. Unsurprisingly, she had a lot of concerns before the visit,

*'What if they are creepy guys who just assemble their own strange bicycles? What if there is only one person and he can't help me as much as I need? What if they don't know how to fix it either? What if I am bothering them too much? What if I do not do it properly, then I fall off when I ride it? Can I blame it on them? I really don't know.'*

Albeit with suspicion, Lisa borrowed her friend's car to take the bicycle there. When she reached the street, she noticed a metal door with a small piece of poster of the workshop. The door was open. She walked downstairs to the basement, hearing the sound of working tools from one corridor. The door was ajar; there was light from within. She walked in, seeing a space full of piles of bicycles and parts of all kinds. Except for recognizing the parts of tyres, rims, and frames, she could not make any sense out of the boxes of materials. Four young men were bending over the work with their bicycles, three of whom did not notice her coming. One, with a tattoo of the five letters 'vegan' on his right arm, heard her step in, looked at her, offered a curt 'hi', and before Lisa said 'hi' back, quickly went back to his work. Her 'hi' was floating in the air for a while and fell into pieces without being caught by the guy. Then, there was no response anymore. She thought of saying 'hi' to everybody. Quickly she gave up as she decided it was rude and it would disturb them. What is more, among the four, she could not tell from their appearance who was the volunteer she could ask for help.

She felt strongly unwelcome.

It was very different from her prior experiences in any business bicycle store. After entering the place, she was always greeted by a person with 'How can I help you' and a warm smile. The staff in the store explicitly put their social selves in the position

of being ready to help, whilst in this place those did not happen. She had read in the newspaper that volunteers were available to help. However, the place and the people did not provide any signal for her to interpret this situation as such. On the contrary, she felt people were not willing to help.

She decided to get herself ready for the repair work first. At least she could find a place to put her bicycle upside down. But, confusion came again, where? She looked around and realized there was only some space left near the entrance,

*'Can I just occupy that place? Am I allowed? Will I block people's way out? Do I have to ask for permission? But who to ask?'*

At that time, she saw one guy rising to get tools. *'Excuse me,'* Lisa decided to catch this opportunity. Once she had eye contact with the guy, she naturally fell into the social interaction mode of self-introduction, *'Hi, I am Lisa. I came here to repair my bicycle. Do you know where I can put my bike?'*

*'Hi, I am Juha. Hmmm ...'* He looked around the place, *'Well, wherever you like.'*

This answer was a bit surprising for Lisa as she expected a clear guide with some *dos* and *don'ts*. More or less taking the guide *'wherever you like'* as the permission, she moved her bicycle to the entrance area. Now, here came the challenge that she realized she had no way to avoid and had to learn to overcome in this particular workshop: she had to bother someone to ask for help.

After all the puzzles in the beginning, Lisa finally got help when a guy walked passing her bicycle and noticed her rusted chain: *'Oh, your chain is all rusted.'*

*'Really?'* Lisa immediately took the turn, as she knew how to enter social interaction, *'Is that why it is so heavy to ride? Do you know what should I do?'* She felt it much easier to ask for help since the guy initiated the conversation.

*'Hmmm, it is difficult to remove the rust. Maybe you just need to change it for a new one. There is a box over there where you can find some new ones.'* He pointed at a box in the corner and walked out.

Lisa felt huge relief as finally there was a clear instruction about what to do next. But, when she saw the box filled with chains of different lengths, she felt confused. She realized she was in the embarrassing moment of needing help again, right after the previous help had been offered. Lisa was expecting that when the guy came back, he would sense/understand she needed



help, walk towards her and nicely say, 'How can I help you?'

Unfortunately, he did not. He directly went back to his own work.

Later on, when she recalled those moments of getting help, she realized there was no instruction for her to interact with people when the role of money was missing in the situation:

*'It is just odd to ask someone for help who you are not paying. I was also really worried I would bother someone who was also a visitor, not there to help. And what is worse, when I realized I had to ask help again and again when I was changing the chain, I felt like I was showing my ignorance and dependence. But, there again, people there were, hmm ...'*

The waves of complaints did not come. Instead, she paused, weighing up an appropriate word to describe the people. After quickly showing an expression of complaint, she reluctantly curved her mouth with the word 'helpful'. Immediately, she realized it was not the type of 'helpful' as she usually defines it, 'But, they could have been nicer. Oh ... no, I am not saying they were not nice. But, could have been warmer, you know.'

### 3.3. Aesthetics of Materiality: *'Let Us Ride it out of the Junk!'*



Figure 6: When entering the bicycle workshop

#### 3.3.1. Junk?

This section investigates the material base of the bicycle workshop and the working means of 'bricolage' behind it. The whole ecological material characteristic is 'junk'. The workshop was a repertory filled with various kinds of discarded bicycle parts (Figure 6). They were either donated by bicycle users who did not see the value anymore, or collected out of the waste stream or urban trash pickups. Broken bicycles occupied a large amount of space: used tyres in all sizes hung from the walls; bicycle frames of various shapes and colours were jumbled up in the corners; boxes of small parts, such as hangers,

brakes, and pedals, were piled on the shelves in a muddle. None had a price tag or product package. None was collected through the circulation of the monetary system. All in all, these materials were ‘useless’, temporally at least, for the market. For outsiders, the usual first impression of this place is that it was a dump filled with junk. One of my subjects described *Paja*: ‘*People told me I could assemble a bicycle there. So I went. But that workshop is completely a dump.*’

However, when I got closer, I found that a large amount of repair and assembly work made use of this jumble and muddle, fully and creatively. People who directly bought a complete bicycle from a shop judged it as either functional or non-functional, like many other modern technologies with a simple interface of an on/off switch. However, for the people who assembled bicycles, a bicycle was more taken as a warehouse of parts. Each part, in its mechanical sense, could be valuable in this ‘warehouse’ or in another one. This value went beyond the present functional quality or monetary worth. This is because the members were capable of seeing the value in abandoned parts while other people could not, and further turn any ‘useless’ part into ‘useful’. It is such capability that is the very core nature of the mechanical work in this workshop. It is ‘bricolage’, a term introduced by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966) in the book, *The savage mind*, to describe a means of working in primitive society, distinguishing it from the engineer’s scientific means.

### 3.3.2. Bricolage: Heterogeneous, contextually limited, and infinitely creative

A bricoleur is someone who works with their hands to make do with ‘whatever at hand’ by devious means. The people who assemble bicycles in *Paja* can be called ‘bricoleurs’. They choose among a variety of disparate spare parts that appear in the workshop from random donations and collections without a thorough plan. These parts were made for previous bicycles, without the intent to bear relation to the present project. Either way, each remained a piece of oddments that was not produced or meant to have relevance to each other. In the vignette in the ‘breaching experiments’, Lee found that the two pedals of the assembled bicycle were disparate, as the two used to belong to different systems before they were chosen for this bicycle. It is no wonder that the bricolage bicycle seems to lack a clear order among its parts compared with the unified style language of the branded Raleigh bicycle.

Besides this heterogeneity, the building process is highly contextually limited, which cannot be pre-planned. The choice of the materials is very limited, as the process is always constrained by the history of each material piece remaining from the past. The bricoleur's work remains within what they have, unlike engineers, who seek the way out of constraints. Differently from engineers' means that trained designers are familiar with, doing work with a set of materials and tools that are chosen and examined for the purpose of a particular project, the bricolage process cannot be defined by the project. Instead, it depends on the possibility, the kind of 'possibility of putting a different element there', as Lévi-Strauss puts it (p. 19). The definite and determinate use of one piece does not find a place in bricolage. Rather, it is presented as potential uses in a set of possible relations. The result heavily depends on the circumstance or context during that specific moment. It cannot be planned, foreseen, or preferred before it actually takes place in the context. It is a contingent result instead of a definite one. When you are assembling a bicycle at *Paja*, you never know how the process will proceed until you find one piece that happens to be lying in the corner necessary, and rethink and reuse it for the bicycle you are building. This contrasts with the process of designing one definite design plan first, then looking for a set of materials and tools, selecting and adding them to fit the pre-conceived blueprint, which is how Lee's Raleigh bicycle was made.

Bricolage seems to have very limited possibilities due to the constraints of the odds and ends. However, it reveals the infinite creativity of making things. As it is not fixed in its designated purpose, bricolage opens up a new realm of use. When unrelated elements meet, they enter into new interactions with unexpected others. The original function is subverted, the boundary of the previous system is broken, and new formations are produced. In this context, it undergoes continual development that is not fixed (Julier, 2009). Assembling a functional bicycle out of 'junk' with unrelated odds and ends requires unique capability. The bricoleur considers and reconsiders what the part contains, as well as what it may potentially contain, and engages it with a new dialogue. Each step requires deep understanding of each piece of material, recognition of the new value, and reorganization into the new use. This partly explains why *Paja's* organizers are open to any donated parts, useful or useless, functional or non-functional. To be more precise, no single part is useless for them, as one volunteer told me '*They will be useful one day in the future*'.

At *Paja*, in many cases, a shiny bicycle can be just assembled out of the junk. ‘*Everything is from that dump?*’ I asked once.

‘*Sure!*’ He answered proudly, ‘*Well, not really a dump strictly. Look, these pedals are almost new. The frame was made in Hämeenlinna, in the 1990s. At that time they made good ones. You can see the owner used it only a few times.*’

‘*But why did people throw it away?*’ I asked.

He sighed slightly, ‘*Well, maybe just one part of the bicycle was broken, then they threw away the whole. Or they moved somewhere else.*’

Here, I demonstrate one way in which the *Paja* community produces new functions and meanings of bicycles out of discarded pieces that many people see as useless junk. Every summer, the community organizes a one-day bicycle building festival, *Let us ride it out of the junk*, with the highlighted event, *Bike wars*. For half a day, each participant builds a bicycle out of the junk and they ram them

into each other. The bicycle that is the most unbeatable wins. There is only one rule of bicycle building: it needs to be rideable. Thus, all other established requirements for being a bicycle do not matter, not how many wheels, how tall, with or without handles or a seat. Bicycles are built based on the collection the bicycle workshop has during that day, the odds and ends, the bits left over, and sets of unrelated spare parts. The following pictures (Figures 7–11) provide a vivid image of how pieces are re-imagined and re-purposed to build strong and unbeatable bicycles. These bikes are called ‘freak bikes’ or ‘mutant bikes’, which are largely built using the means of bricolage (Carlsson, 2007; Furness, 2010). By actively hacking and modifying the meanings and functions of the bicycle, the junk-welding bricoleurs give new lives to the pieces. They push bicycles in new directions by challenging their utilitarian uses beyond any conventional sense of the world.



Figure 7: Metal scraps were collected and welded as a protective cover against strong impacts.



Figure 8: After welding two frames and several metal sticks together, they were looking for suitable rims.



Figure 9: He welded more than three unrelated frames into one.



Figure 10: He installed many bicycle baskets on the rear rim in order to make the bicycle more defensive.



Figure 11: He arrived late. As there was not much time left for him to carefully design and build one, he quickly picked two wheels from a children's tricycle and started building.

### 3.3.3. Closing

The visual appearance of the bicycle workshop is far from the aesthetics of modern consumption; the cleanness, comfort, and decent refinement which we usually see in a store. At first impressions, the bicycle workshop is a dump. However, these discarded pieces are waiting for new uses and formations. For the members, a bicycle means a mechanical platform, an assemblage body, and an on-going project, which supports constant change and the hacking of every single piece. During this process, the bricoleur renews themselves through their engagement with objects. They constantly define and redefine their relations with the material world, which means they never end themselves in the completion (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p. 21). This is the working means of a bricoleur I am demonstrating in this workshop, the very basic philosophy underlying the members' ways of interacting with the material environment and the world in general. The sociologist Douglas Harper (1987) captures such wisdom in the mechanic Willie, an American jack-of-all-trades, working in an auto repair shop in the suburb area of New York. He describes the mechanic making a mark on the material world with 'most strenuous endeavours' and 'patient and monotonous effort' (p. 18). The nature of the work is 'in contrast to general cultural values of planned obsolescence' (p. 9). Harper calls for a serious look at it, this skill that is disappearing in our modern life. Is there still any space for a person like Willi, for his material engagement and judgement?

Fortunately, I see it in this bicycle workshop.

## 3.4. News Aesthetics of Experiences: Service Ethos Relating to Active Agency

I have presented two vignettes, focusing on describing the scenic moments of discomfort, confusion, and embarrassment that Lee and Lisa experienced at *Paja*. From the first look, *Paja* seems to be a very negative case of service, in which both faced inconsistency and negligence according to their expectations based on the prior experiences. The 'crappy' second-hand bicycle discredited Lee's normalcy of identity expression, as he purchases decent brand products with a desirable visual appearance. The difficult physical access that took too much of Lee's effort upset him. And his background knowledge did not help him deal with the situation that 'nobody was there' during the opening hours. For Lisa, asking

people for help who were not being paid was a break from the social norms. Thus, the social interaction was embarrassing. At her initial impression, the workshop appeared disorganized, with a serious lack of consistency and standardization, and its people were unwelcoming and lacked empathy.

These service assumptions are in line with the commercially generated aesthetics evolving from commercial service sectors, such as consistency, precision, refinement, efficiency, and convenience. Such aesthetics of comfort are widely accepted and taken for granted by consumers. However, from a business sense, the subcultural group of punk-cyclists may have different notions of consistency and standardization, and of user experiences and use, all which are embedded within their practices. Some practices generate negative experiences, like what happened with Lee and Lisa, whilst others interpret them positively.

### 3.4.1. The anarchistic way of scheduling

As portrayed above, Lee encountered the situation that the workshop was closed during its opening hours. However, Lee is not alone. Many visitors feel confused with volunteers' presence. Although the opening hours '4 pm–8 pm' is clearly marked, people constantly ask on the workshop's Facebook page, '*Is anybody there today?*' or '*From what time to what time are you open today?*'.

In order to avoid unpleasant situations, one can easily propose pre-planned scheduling, or the use of online communicative tools for the arrangement of attendance, through which volunteers can publish their attendance information in real time and visitors can check with more certainty. Actually, they have tried an online calendar where they need to mark their presence. Nevertheless, it failed to be accepted by the community members. The interaction with the 'form', the invention for modern human organization, brought negative experiences. One member explained his rejection, '*I am here when I come. I don't check in, otherwise, I feel like I am at work.*' Now, I explain that the sense of regulation that the online calendar brought did not fit the members' anarchistic perception of 'scheduling' and 'time'.

Among the community, ten members have keys to the workshop. The attendance arrangement among the ten is flexible, in that you come when you have spare time or just 'feel like it'. There is limited formal communication among the members about their physical presence at the site, including who is coming or not, and

who is there already. This shows members' distinct perception of time and scheduling, contrasting with the strict scheduling of service in the business context. Thus, the fundamental rhythm of 'on time' in the industrial society becomes a luxurious requirement or just unnecessary. They refuse to restrict themselves to rigid scheduling in the modern work system, which is increasingly detached from organic body rhythms and dictated by external mechanical constraints, like the calendar or the clock (Zerubavel, 1985). Members agree to loosely maintain the system with a spirit of anarchism, which means that everybody acts as they wish rather than out of external constraints, like time scheduling. In this workshop, time is less the dictator of the service schedule or precise measurement of labour. To take another example, the workshop does not strictly close at eight o'clock in the evening. On many occasions, the closing time is influenced by the repair process during that day.

It is unfair to claim that members do not have ways of scheduling. It just does not appear visible to outsiders. The members, who have formed a close social circle as friends, have vague ideas of each other's lives, such as who is busy or socially accessible at this moment. They have informal commitments between each other rather than a formal commitment to the place. Thus, their anarchistic way works fairly well. Except for very few times, during most of their posted opening hours, there were at least three members available in the workshop. However, the few times of 'nobody being there' certainly appeared as unacceptable for visitors who were used to the absolute promise that conventional service businesses make concerning their opening hours.

### 3.4.2. Members' social interaction manner:

#### *'We only help when people ask.'*

As described in the vignette, *'Nobody comes to talk to me!'*, social access to the workshop was difficult for Lisa, who was familiar with the interaction manners of service employees in the business context. She found the volunteers unwelcoming, requiring much effort in communication. For instance, as with Lisa, one visitor also found himself failing to manage the smoothness of social interactions:

*'I was disappointed. I was not sure how much that guy was willing to help. He did not show much interest in helping me. He did not appear nice or welcoming. I did not know how to communicate with him. I felt like I was bothering him.'*



It is rather misleading, however, if we portray the volunteers as people who do not put themselves in the position of being of service to others. Rather, they take a different approach to offering help. They act only when the visitor asks for help. This means, precisely, they do not proactively offer help if the visitor does not ask. This social manner is principally attributed to the values the members hold, which is leaving full space for people to act on their own. Once, when I was watching people in the workshop from the sofa, a volunteer was resting next to me, and a man was building a wheel next to him. This was his first time building a bicycle wheel. He was following a tutorial video online, and the volunteer was watching him. After about 15 minutes, it seemed that he was building it in the wrong way, so he decided to start again. The second time, he got stuck in the middle of the process again.

After building the fifth spoke during the third try, he turned to the volunteer and asked, *'Is this the right way to begin?'* The volunteer responded, *'Not really,'* and pointed to the other hole in the rim, *'It is easier to start the second spoke from here.'*

I got annoyed that the volunteer had watched the guy making mistakes for almost one hour. Later, I asked the volunteer, *'Why did not you tell him earlier?'*

His answer explicitly demonstrated the members' social interaction codes in the workshop: *'He did not ask'.*

The volunteer insisted not offering advice that the guy did not ask for. This indicates that he regarded visitors as self-directed individuals who want and are able to act independently, and should

have full control over the repair act. This means they make autonomous decisions in the repair process, including when to ask for help. Thus, the member's passive communicative manner leads to a positive space of freedom for the visitors who embrace DIY ethics. This is from a visitor's account:

*'The workshop dudes are pretty cool! They don't act like teachers [...] [the] first step and [the] second step. I don't need to ask for permission, can I borrow this or that, can I do this way or not. I can do whatever I want.'*

The member's social manner that was considered apathy by Lisa was appreciated by this visitor. Such appreciation requires a certain quality of capability of the visitor, which is an independent attitude. Asking for help is not bothering other people, but asking for help before trying hard is. As the guy who was building the wheel described above, he tried for almost one hour by himself. However, he still carefully chose the way to ask for help in order to show his self-reliant attitude and to avoid showing ignorance. Instead of asking *'How should I build the wheel?'*, he chose *'Is this the right way?'*

### 3.4.3. Becoming a member: It is not for everyone

In my research, many visitors expressed that the workshop was difficult to use, for example it was hard to find the location or the spare parts they needed. As a response, they proposed more comprehensive guidance to serve and attract more visitors. Can this user-centred advice really work for the bicycle workshop? Let us first review an account.

At a two-day annual second-hand market event, I met the *Paja* community opening a pop-up bicycle workshop with a price tag of ten euro hanging. I recognized a member who was bending down and changing the tyre of a 22-inch bicycle. Next to him, a girl was standing and watching him with a coffee cup in her hand.

After the repair work, I asked him, *'Hey, what happened? You guys are opening a repair shop now? No self-repair, no learning?'* He appeared slightly frustrated and shrugged.

*'We did it last year. It didn't work out. People here are quite different. We told them they needed to do the work by themselves and we were only here to help. But they didn't listen. They knew little about repair. They did not want to learn. Well, we ended up with repairing for them. This year, we decide to charge money. It is faster and easier for us, and we can earn some money.'*

For once, the group was attempting to bring themselves closer to the mainstream. Encountering a larger amount of visitors than ever before, they failed to maintain the fundamental principle of the workshop. What does it reveal about the consequences of 'difficult use'? The answer lies in the account when one member was introducing similar bicycle workshops operating in other cities,

*'There is a similar one in Paris. It is in a much more central place. Such a good location allows more random people to come. They charge a 50 euro membership fee to use the space and tools. I think it is reasonable that they have this criterion for the access otherwise there will be more random people and it is harder to control.'*

Drawing from the two accounts, it becomes clear the self-repair workshop needs to filter out 'random' people to function well, and the difficult access happens to serve this function, probably without the members realizing it. 'Random' people refer to those who do not have shared repair interests or an independent attitude. The people visiting the second-hand market were in the 'random' category, who were unlikely to appear in the workshop in the basement. People need to be motivated enough to find and reach the place, not to turn away when facing a 'dump', to ask for help from strangers and to deal with uncertainties of all kinds.

By demonstrating the way Lee transformed his effort into social capital, I want to point out that important meanings and values are in fact deeply embedded in that experience. When asked to propose improvements to the workshop service, Lee initially pointed out that the place should be easier to find. However, after suggesting several other improvements, he hesitated. He thought for a while, and then ended up negating his own suggestions:

*'It's easy to suggest clearer navigation information to make the place easier to access. But after having been there, I don't think there is a need. Strangely, it brings me a sense of pride. I won't feel special by visiting Stockmann. What I can imagine, say next time a friend's bicycle broke down, then I could bring him there. It would make me more helpful. It is true I suffered finding the place. But... it doesn't matter for me now. The feeling of being part of an underground community, isn't it more important? The whole experience is like playing a computer game.'*

This radical change appears rather surprising if we remember his confusion and frustration described in Section 3.2.1. The change started from the moment when Lee learned a new way of removing a tyre from a rim and saw someone building a racing bicycle. In the end,

Lee was impressed by the workshop as a positive place of learning. He puts ‘becoming a member of the community’ as the priority, that he gets more social capital and community knowledge. When he learns all the rules that do not appear clear or visible for newcomers, he sees this as bringing him a sense of pride. He considers the difficult and unpleasant process as a way of knowing and a process of socialization through personal experience. That is to say, the discomfort is transformed into a process of being communally selected, and of differentiating himself from others in a quite positive way. That is the reason why, in the end, he hesitated to propose making better navigation information graphics for this service; because once the information becomes clear, it is equally easy for everyone and his hard-earned knowledge becomes less meaningful. Unlike the conventional business context, the very nature of this community refers to a process of getting more familiar and of learning, a process of becoming a member of the community.

### 3.5. Opening Up the Resistant Fences with the Mainstream

In the beginning, when I was approaching the bicycle workshop, I presumed to have an ameliorative agenda that hypothesizes that designers can help communities by lending them design expertise. Through the study, I have learned the norms and orders established in the workshop and the values underlying them. What, then, can be the ameliorative approach to the workshop? How can designers help the community?

I hesitated.

From the service user’s perspective, I have illuminated different notions concerning consistency and standardization of the service, the experiences, and articulated values. To better understand the critical distance from the ethos of conviviality, I wish to summarize the design ideas that the eight subjects in ‘breaching experiments’ proposed after they had experienced the workshop for the first time. All have an educational background in design, and I asked them to deliver design proposals after experiencing *Paja*. However, I do not suggest seeing their responses as serious design proposals based on deep understandings of the values or agenda of the workshop and the people. They are more personal expression immediately after fresh experiences. Nevertheless, these suggestions can add to the understanding of the challenges some design

assumptions face in the space of conviviality. To put it in one sentence, these suggestions are mainly user-centred, aiming to make the service more convenient and efficient to use: the spare parts should be more organized so that visitors do not need to spend too much time searching for the needed parts; tissues and aprons should be provided for the repair work; volunteers should be visually identified and appear more friendly. Some subjects also proposed to help the community to make more strategic promotion and development plans.

Does the workshop need these design visions and knowledge? Does the workshop need improvement or development? If yes, in which way and towards what does it need to be improved? Does the community intend to target the masses to make a societal change, or to stay in a niche corner of society to maintain their subcultural identity?

To better answer these questions, we need to understand their relations with the 'mainstream', the counterpart to the 'subculture', if we admit that they are one. Subcultural studies argue that the creation of subculture is built on a reaction against the main currents of society (e.g. Duncombe, 2008; Frank & Weiland, 1992; Furness, 2010). The elements of negation, like rebellion and resistance, play a major role in their identity formation. This means they not only express 'what we are', but also, and even more importantly, 'what we are **not**'. The formation of a negative identity only has meaning when it is closely related to what it is against (Duncombe, 2008, p. 42). Thus, the subcultural group has a resistant and negative relation with the mainstream.

Within the boundary of the bicycle workshop, the community proposes and practices distinct orders and values from the commercial logic. It becomes a 'safe place' to imagine and experiment with new ideas and alternatives (p. 177). It offers a 'magical resolution' of the problems of mainstream society (p. 190). Furness called such a social place 'a nature preserve' in the cultural sense,

'The safe place, in other words, ends up functioning like the cultural equivalent of a nature preserve, whereby life flourishes inside the fences but the borders are, ironically, the only thing keeping the environment looking so vibrant.' (2010, Loc. 2487-2488)

These researchers attempt to point out the territorial nature of the subcultural place, referring to the fences that members use to practice alternative orders and separate 'us' from 'them'.

Now we come to the question: should the members or the mainstream open the fences? This concern leads to a larger topic of subcultural groups' political and transformative impact. Should, will, and how do these small communities, in the end, lead to a larger societal change? Duncombe explicitly argues that societal change does not happen automatically after the 'cultural imagination' of alternatives (2008, p. 175). If no leap is made to connect the small cultures of alternatives to political implementation, it means little (*ibid.*). However, some do not see the necessity of the transformative role of these communities. Mickey Z. who wrote on the self-publishing magazine, *Zine*, gave advice to negate:

'Stop wasting energy in futile efforts to change the world, and set up your own little world in your own time and space in which you can experience the revolutionary pleasure of thinking for yourself.'<sup>17</sup>

Such a gesture might show 'the fear of getting too big and thus losing intimacy, authenticity, and control', or 'a willed result of the underground's negative identity' (Duncombe, 2008, pp. 185-186). As we have learned, the maintenance of fences leads to limited changing agency if members celebrate among themselves inside the 'nature preserve' and refuse to work with others.

On the other hand, some design theorists, like Ezio Manzini, hold the opposite view. He believes and calls for the transformative function of subcultural groups, although he used others names like 'creative communities' (Meroni, 2007).<sup>18</sup> He and his research network spent years exploring what designers can contribute to creating desirable and sufficient conditions for 'seeds' to grow, both in quantity and quality, to have a societal change. Through design frameworks like co-design and empathic design, they propose to leverage local creativities, to scale it up, to make the alternative model stronger and duplicable, or to communicate it to a larger audience or even the authorities (2015). However, the negative identity formation of the 'seeds' is rarely explicitly discussed in their design literature. I suppose

*Paja* is one of the social groups that Manzini would call 'islands'. When Manzini strongly proposes amplifying 'seeds', he explicitly refuses to talk about the reality of the 'land', the 'powerful forces that are fighting

<sup>17</sup> Referred to in Duncombe's book (2008, p. 190): Mickey Z, *The Reality manifesto: A look at pseudo-life in the post-modern age* (Baltimore, MD: Apathy Press Poets, 1993), no page.

<sup>18</sup> Anna Meroni defined 'creative communities' as groups who consciously act to break with mainstream ways of thinking and doing (2007). Culturally, this is close to the principle of a subcultural group.

against the emergence of a new, sustainable world' (2015, p. 27).<sup>19</sup> There are only two lines where he describes the relation between 'the island' and the mainstream:

'They are islands in the sea of unsustainable ways of being and doing that is, unfortunately, still the mainstream throughout the world. The good news is that the number of these islands is growing and generating a wide archipelago.'  
(2015, p. 26)

He intends to change the boundary without realizing the crucial character of the boundary. It is not clear whether such a naturalization is made intentionally or not. However, drawing on my study of one 'seed', I call for full awareness of the community's negative social identity and the resistant relation with the mainstream. The understanding of the workshop's resistant fences with the mainstream brings a critical perspective to the approach of 'growing seeds' in the field of design for social innovation (Section 1.2); either the system-thinking logics of vertical integration or horizontal scaling-up. Shall we integrate this workshop with the city's public services? Shall we scale up the workshop to attract more people with business logic? Will these developments face the resistance of the members?<sup>20</sup> If the fences are open, will the life remain 'flourishing' and 'vibrant'?

Regarding the boundary between *Paja* and the mainstream, I would like to add one more paragraph to argue that not only are the punk-cyclists shaking the boundary, but also the practices relating to my study are attentive to the social boundary. The practices include 'breaching experiments' in the field, the analytical perspective, the subject's design proposals, and my construction of Plant Hotel. The subcultural group critically investigates the social boundaries by constructing a service of *Paja* to the public. They offer tools and advice to support and encourage more self-repair practices, which is their opening up gesture to shake the resistant boundary with the mainstream (Section 3.5). However, their rejection of re-orientating

themselves with business logic or the aesthetics of mainstream society to serve and attract more visitors is still constrained in the negative formation of identity of 'what we are **not**'.

Thus, the practices of organizing the workshop are the community's constant

<sup>19</sup> His argument is that it is not his job, as a reflective designer, to talk about the 'enemy force' in his design book, as other people can do it better. However, it is inadequate to deliver half of the story to the reader, especially design students who will work to 'grow seeds' in practice.

<sup>20</sup> Similar debates happen among the subcultural group of squatters: should the squatted social centres be developed into business establishments serving the public or not (Mudu, 2013)?

negotiation of their boundary with the mainstream. In addition, in the study, when I took eight newcomers, who were only familiar with commercial services, to *Paja*, the boundary was shaken and articulated through service encounters, from where negative experiences and the discontinuity and disruption of situation definition and action formation emerged. From this method, the field data inevitably leads to analysis and findings on the orientation to the boundary, which is around different notions of service assumptions and values in a service of conviviality and a commercial service. The other aspect is the design suggestions that the subjects proposed to improve the services of the workshop. These ideas relating to making the place more convenient and easy to use, or more promoted, actually aimed to weaken the boundary with the mainstream. Moreover, the last aspect is my designerly response of opening a workshop carrying the values and aesthetics in *Paja* to a larger audience, which is to implicitly reshape the social boundary between the subcultural group and the mainstream.

### 3.6. *Paja* as a Mirror: From Anthropology as Critique

*'Anthropology is not the mindless collection of the exotic,  
but the use of cultural richness for self-reflection and self-growth.'*  
- Marcus and Fisher (1986)

In this chapter, I have taken you to a bicycle workshop (a place of conviviality) and its people (a group of punk-cyclists who embrace DIY ethics). This is a case of service in the marginal, a bricolage form of material engagement, and equally a type of subculture. I have given them the most serious look and a detailed description on what they do and value. There is no intent to romanticize the bicycle workshop, nor elevate it to a noble level. Rather, it is to learn to deeply appreciate the people for what they are and the aesthetics of the place, in the broad sense of this term.

Meantime, the study of *Paja* serves one more aim. Through the study of subcultural practices and values, we know the mainstream better. Through the study of rules that govern a visitor's behaviours in *Paja*, we know those who visit a business bicycle workshop better. This position is from the theoretical orientation of anthropology that

argues that anthropology can serve as cultural critique by means of studying 'others'.

Anthropologists are trained to invest a very long period of time into immersion with a group of cultural others. What is the aim? Certainly, as widely acknowledged, it is to systematically capture cultural diversity so as to build the encyclopaedia of humanity on the planet. In addition, it enlightens people with the appreciation of other human possibilities and refusal of the concept of homogenization towards a single mode. However, besides the primary promises, the anthropologists George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1986) argue that anthropology has always been said more about 'us' than about 'the other'. We do not study others just to know them better. We study them to reveal ourselves.

How can we understand ourselves by knowing others? Marcus and Fischer say:

'In using portraits of other cultural patterns to reflect self-critically on our own ways, anthropology disrupts common sense and makes us re-examine our take-for-granted assumptions.' (p. 1)

They argue that defamiliarization serves as a key means for cultural critique within anthropology. When we compare our practices with those of exotic others, it might lead us to question the way in which we normally think about things and raise havoc with our settled ways (p. 138). It provides us with a fresh lens to attend to things in ways we have never done before.

Ethnography, as the distinctive method in anthropology, has a capacity to provide detailed descriptions and analysis of cultural others. This is where the strength of ethnography as cultural critique lies. When ethnography poses an alternative, it insists on a 'fundamental descriptive realism' (p. 116). It does not display an ideal or overly romantic life. Rather, it empirically discovers practices and meanings in detail in the process of daily life in the other reality. It is a bottom-up approach compared with abstract theory discussions. It pays enduring respect to the context and fully recognizes the ambiguous, multiple, and complex possibilities in any situation. Thus, the power that ethnography brings is that the critique is not at the cost of de-contextualizing, generalizing, or stereotyping (p. 159).

The pioneer work treating anthropology as cultural critique is Margaret Mead's (1954) study on adolescence in Samoa and New

Guinea. Based on her observations in the exotic field, she developed a foreign perspective to de-familiarize Americans' perception of their own customs of child rearing. It brought fresh eyes to re-examine the issues of pressure and rebellion that American adolescence faced and the social and cultural causes that could be altered.

There are also works of a similar approach in the design field. In the 1970s, design activists used anthropological work on material cultures, especially craft making and using in pre-industrial and non-capitalistic societies. They attempted to provide alternatives to disturb self-satisfaction and to question designers' social and ecological role in making products in their culture, namely, bourgeois and middle-class life in market-driven societies (Clarke, 2011). One example is the Italian design educators Adolfo Natalini and Alessandron Poli whose teaching course sent students to Italian villages to document folk farming tools and analyse the significance of these indigenous objects. The teachers claimed that the intent was to subvert the formal structure of design knowledge and to erase 'the dominance of a single middle-class culture' (Lang & Menking, 2003, p. 113).

Now again, designers look for alternative ways of doing and thinking outside the mainstream with the aim of sustainability. I was approaching *Paja* with the hypothesis that design can lend the community knowledge and skills that they lack, and with the ambition of extending the role of design in the new field. After the study, I found that one of the implications for design is that *Paja* serves as a mirror to lend us a new lens with which to de-familiarize the things that we are familiar with and challenge the things we take for granted in service design and everyday life in general. Exposing the community's different understanding of what their 'customers' need and can do shakes the conceptualization of customers or users in service design, which otherwise would not be examined. When some design suggestions, like providing aprons or adding more guidance signs, that some designers quickly propose without any hesitation, faced resistance in *Paja*, the taken-for-granted assumptions were doubted and might lead to further critical reflections.



# Chapter 4

Plant Hotel 1:  
Constructing  
the Ethos of *Paja*



PLANTS  
NEED  
YOU!

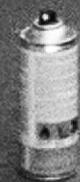




Figure 12: Plant Hotel 1 in a neighbourhood gallery

I introduced the shift from the study of *Paja* to the construction of the first Plant Hotel in Section 1.5: the concept of opening Plant Hotel where people could visit and water other's plants was inspired by the service ethos in *Paja*. The first was opened in a neighbourhood gallery (Figure 12). We were expecting a plain neighbourhood place, just like a store or café on the street. In the end, given the limited budget and unavailability of commercial spaces in a short period, we chose a gallery in the Punavuori neighbourhood. We had no intent to choose a distinctive artistic place. The operating model of the art gallery fit well with the schedule of our short-period design intervention project. Also, as we expected, it was a plain, unimpressive, and small place.

However, an incident happened. After we had reserved one and half months in the gallery, we were told that another curator already booked the slot, and the only time for Plant Hotel was the last week in July. We decided to do it still. However, it was almost impossible to engage people who happened to have a holiday during that week. In order to make sure that we would have plants for people to water during this short period, we messaged the people who clicked 'going'

to the Facebook event<sup>21</sup> asking whether they would bring plants and how many. If we had one month, the strategy might have been different.

Respecting the material configuration of the physical place, I employed several strategies to create a convivial and participatory place to support and enable vibrancy in visitors' interactions (Section 4.1). Following the aesthetics of materiality in *Paja*, I attempted to set up the physical place by recycling and using all objects *ad hoc* (Section 4.2). Moreover, by analysing how participants interpreted and acted with the constructed situation, I discuss the meanings of Plant Hotel and the guest plants that were together constructed by designers, plant owners, caregivers, and spectators (Section 4.3).

## 4.1. Aesthetics of Experiences: Designing to Encourage Active Participation

The primary rule I learned from the bicycle workshop is the active and convivial agency of visitors who are not customers to be served. It was crucial for Plant Hotel that the responsibility for watering was shifted to visitors. People asked us several times whether we watered plants secretly. Some artists even said we could secretly water. My response was 'no', as the primary goal of the project was the engagement of passers-by rather than the survival of plants, although the plants were also important.

I constructed the situation with the attempt to provide adequate clues and resources for visitors to render themselves as active individuals. Visitors should not feel constrained not to be allowed to do things as they wanted. This meant that at the same time, I would provide constraints for visitors to act passively. To achieve these, I employed three strategies: the avoidance of framing a gallery-like place, the introduction of a level of discomfort, and the display of confusing rules of social interactions.

When configuring the materiality of the place, we attempted to avoid any possibility that the visitor would interpret the rules of conduct as 'don't touch anything' or 'you are not allowed to do it'. The place should not be related to any image of a clean, imposing, or highly regulated art gallery. It should appear so casual

<sup>21</sup> The gallery and we created a Facebook event of Plant Hotel and invited people to attend.

and relaxing that even some level of messiness and randomness was allowed.

Thus, for plant 'rooms', we refused white exhibition cubes with clean and straight lines, which would stage plants as sacred, rigid, and remote exhibits that could only be watched but not touched. We wanted to avoid the type of interaction where you keep your hands behind your back. In the end, we rented 24 hipster-style metal stools of various colours as plant 'rooms'. Each, with several scratches and faded colour, looked far from being sacred or rigid. In the beginning, we arranged them in a line along the wall, which would allow an easy path for visitors to walk and check each plant. However, this delivered a sense of rigidity. I expected the place to appear disordered, messy, and casual, with a sense of randomness. Thus, we broke the line. In the end, the whole gallery room, scattered with colourful stools, looked like a playground in the kindergarten (Figure 13).

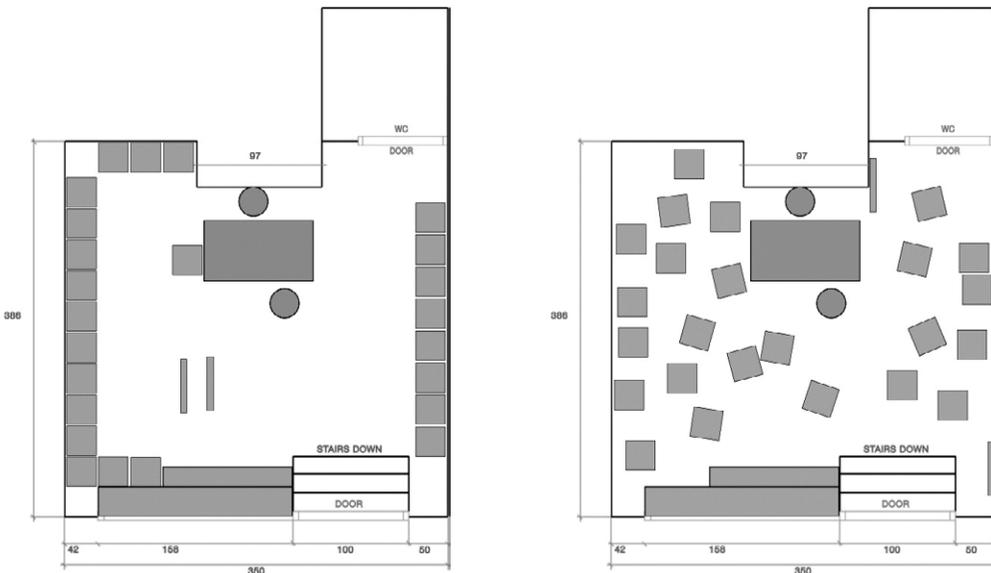


Figure 13: The two plans of arrangement of plant 'rooms', an orderly way (left) and a disorderly way (right)

The second strategy was to introduce a level of discomfort for visitors, with which I hoped to draw more mindful attention from visitors to the plants and the place. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the discomfort that was experienced in *Paja* was related to the members' conceptualization of visitors as independent and active individuals. When visitors complained the workshop is difficult to find, volunteers believed they could find it, as the address had already been given. When visitors found volunteers did not act in a friendly manner, volunteers were ready to help whenever they asked. When visitors felt confused in front of a dump and did not know where to find the right pedal, volunteers believed people can easily find the right one because they have already sorted all the pedals into a box. The volunteers might not have intentionally made the workshop difficult to approach or use. They just believed people have the capability to take care of themselves.

In the design of Plant Hotel, we scattered stools around in a disordered way, with the preparation of the fact that visitors might find it difficult to walk through. We were prepared for people to have to move the stool or squeeze their bodies to move through, to be very careful not to touch the plants, or to bend down to check plants and read the storyboards. There were serious concerns behind the randomness of the material configuration, relating to what level of comfort we wanted to provide to visitors.<sup>22</sup>

In order to encourage new patterns of behaviour, we provided clues to confuse people to form actions, which was the third strategy. Plant Hotel proposed a new way of interacting with other people's possessions, without which people would not have a chance to water a stranger's plants. Against the standardized ways in which we consider it appropriate to interact with another's possessions, it aimed to function as an experimental lab to encourage new patterns of all kinds and to establish 'appropriate' rules. This means I intended to construct a situation where visitors would conduct behaviours that they would not normally take as an option to act.

To each guest plant we attached one 'storyboard' (Figure 14). One side of the 'plant story' was for plant owners to leave messages and the other 'care list' was for caregivers to write down their names and watering dates. Each plant owner needed to give DOs and DON'Ts tips to visitors in the 'plant story'. I told each plant owner that this social setting allowed people to do as they liked, which meant if someone wanted to take the

<sup>22</sup> Regarding discomfort, for instance, should we ask visitors to get water from the water tank by themselves, or to use their own water bottles? In the end, we decided that, at least, we needed to provide the comfort for people to get water easily.

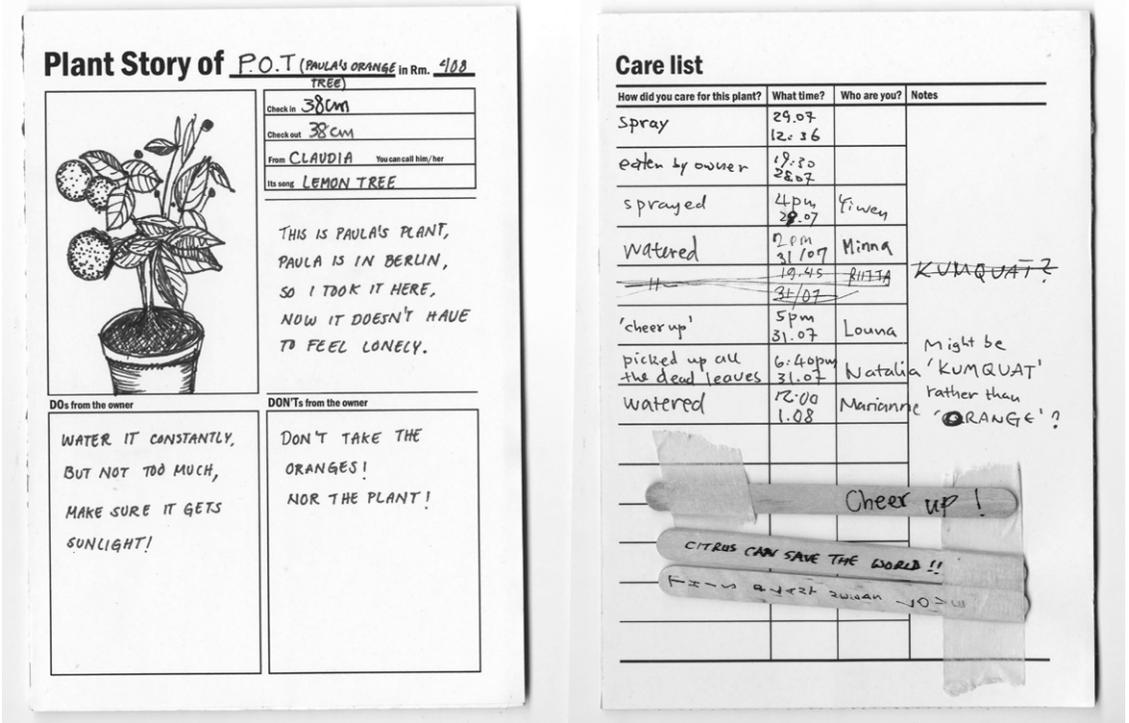


Figure 14: The 'storybook' of one guest plant

plant, we would not stop them unless the owner mentioned it in the DON'Ts. This pushed the owners to rethink taken-for-granted social rules. Regarding the DOs, I encouraged them to think beyond the constraints, even including things they would consider stupid, weird, shameless, or meaningless.

Now, when someone entered Plant Hotel, they would face a situation with 'rules' written on the boards. The strategy of displaying 'rules' explicitly aimed to provide adequate and more direct clues for visitors to interact with guest plants in a way that they would usually define as inappropriate or would never come to mind. Tips like 'Don't take my plant' or 'Don't cook it', which were confusing and hard to interpret, would make visitors wonder and shake their taken-for-granted assumptions: 'How come I would take your plant?'; 'So, if the owner did not write 'don't take', can I take his plant?' Their confusion indicated that their socially standardized knowledge was being challenged and their smooth process of maintaining stable features was interrupted. To encourage more new actions, it is necessary, first of all, to liberate people from patterned orders to some extent. Tips like 'Could you change a bigger pot?' or 'Count the spikes of my cactus.' suggested new ways of interacting with plant owners. Although they

would not be necessarily taken into account by visitors, they, first of all, suggested that it was definitely not a place where one could not touch anything, and furthermore provided more legitimacy for new patterns of interaction.

## 4.2. Recycling and *Ad Hoc* Use of ‘Junk’

The material base of *Paja* was based on recycling and *ad hoc* use of ‘junk’ (Section 3.3). *Ad hoc* use breaks the boundary of the original and pre-designed use of the object and opens up infinite possibilities for new uses of this piece. In addition, the process of collecting and improvisation is opposite to the top-down approach of a central plan made beforehand. It is not decided at once, and materials are not brought according to the uniform plan.

We followed the process of bricolage when we collected materials for Plant Hotel. We tried not to buy, but to recycle things. We checked what we had at hand, looked in the recycling bins in school and borrowed or rented from others. In the following, I tell of three of our practices.

We appropriated the stools as plant ‘rooms’. We also expected visitors to reinterpret *in situ* the affordance of the ‘rooms’ as objects to sit on, put bags on, or write on. Refusing to buy specifically designed watering cans, we brought liquid containers from home, like wine bottles, beer bottles, and champagne glasses.

When we were looking for plant ‘rooms’, I was prepared to borrow stools, stands, or boxes from nearby design studios and shops in the neighbourhood. Even though later we rented 24 stools, I still decided to visit neighbours to collect whatever they would like to lend. I visited each studio and store and asked for any object they thought would be good for plants. In the end, from seven stores I got several objects: plants, toys, glass bottles, and vases. Although these objects might appear boring, for people who were not familiar with where they were from, it was an exciting process of exploration without knowing what would happen next.

In the field, some visitors suggested leftover coffee grounds and beer as good plant fertilizers. Then I provided a bottle of leftover coffee and a bottle of beer along with the water bottles for visitors to interact with plants. The two ideas fit well the spirit of *ad hocism* where daily junk was reused beyond its original boundary.

## 4.3. Plant Hotel as a Showroom of Authentic Stories

How did the participants interpret the objects configured by the designers and assess the rules of Plant Hotel in such a way as to produce a set of new actions they found appropriate or proud of? What were the meanings of the guest plants that were constructed together by the plant owner and the caregivers? Were the existing meanings relating to the boundary of private ownership questioned or changed? Then, what particular meanings were strengthened or created through the interactions? Generally speaking, Plant Hotel, which I attempted to construct as a convivial and participatory place, was finally produced from the actions of participants as a showroom of owners' unique and authentic experiences relating to the 'crafting' of plants.

### 4.3.1. The 'plant' as an expressive object exhibiting 'craftsmanship'

As I mentioned before, due to the short period, we asked people who were interested in the event whether they would like to bring plants. Apart from a few, many plant owners were not away for a holiday. Some had many plants at home and chose to check in a few. Why did they choose these plants? What meanings did they render to the plants when they were opening up the private space of ownership to the public?

It is for a reason that the owner chose to bring *this* plant. From the data, we learned that the checked-in plant told about the owner (*'they just look like me.'*), about a unique engagement (*'I rescued it from the garbage bin'; 'I bought the rosemary for cooking, but I decided to let it grow instead.'*), or because help was needed (*'It grows so weirdly I cannot stop it.'; 'Who knows how to grow chili in Finland?'*). Overall, the guest plant was constructed as an expressive object of the owner and the unique and authentic engagement. In this context, the 'plant' is closer to a craftwork than a possession, and the experiences can be understood through the lens of craftsmanship. The plant richly showed the authentic personal engagement, the continuing effort the owner had committed with the growing, the skills, and knowledge that were developed, and the imagination that was involved.

For instance, one owner brought two plants out of five. The chosen two were fully covered with eggshells (Figure 15), which



Figure 15: The two plants covered with eggshells

was her father's unique way of using leftover egg yolk as an organic fertilizer. She said, '*Because the two just look cute*'. The cuteness includes the visual appearance and as well as her unique way of growing plants. Another owner chose to bring an avocado plant of his 20 plants, so that '*Now people can see how the green is growing from seed and water*,' as he wrote. Both saw the growing of a plant as a personal 'crafting' process involving the assembly of their knowledge, skills, effort, and experiences.

I wish to write particularly about one plant owner to give a more comprehensive picture of how the owner gave meanings to the guest plants and Plant Hotel and rendered her self-image. Instead of claiming that plants were important in her life, I would put her engagement with plants at the centre. It was the set of engagement, the commitment of her continuing effort, the involvement of her imagination and sensation, the sense of care and the process of developing knowledge and skills, which was important in her life. In her small home, she grew about 30 plants, most of which were vegetables. She did not favour the type of cactus that needs little care, which she felt little attached to. She preferred those she could grow from seeds and give intensive care to. More importantly, none was purchased. Either the plants were from friends or the seeds were from the food she eats. She was proud that her garden was growing from her social capital and her imagination, sensation, and experiments: '*I have a garden. I spent not a single penny*.' She thought that seeds that could be purchased from shops were ensured to be functional, and consequently were boring and provided no surprise. She was more interested in experimenting with whatever seeds she got from food. The process was '*so random*,' as she called it. She put any seed in

the soil. Occasionally, she gave plants to her friends to grow. By giving her friends the plants that she has experimented with, she found her value of being needed and inspiring. Growing plants experimentally and randomly was one of her ways of constantly exploring new things and remaining keen on surprises in life. It expressed her as an inspiring and creative individual.

In Plant Hotel, she checked in the plants she had just grown from melon seeds for the first time, and some sprouted avocado seeds and shiso seeds. She also noted on the ‘storyboard’ that she was willing to give them away if any visitor wanted to grow them. When she brought her plants, they were so small that there were even no ‘rooms’ for these tiny plastic coffee cups. We had to improvise ‘rooms’ (Figure 16). However, these humble creatures carried the owner’s great pride.

### 4.3.2. Visitors interacting with plants by responding to authentic stories



Figure 16: Small melon plant in a plastic coffee cup

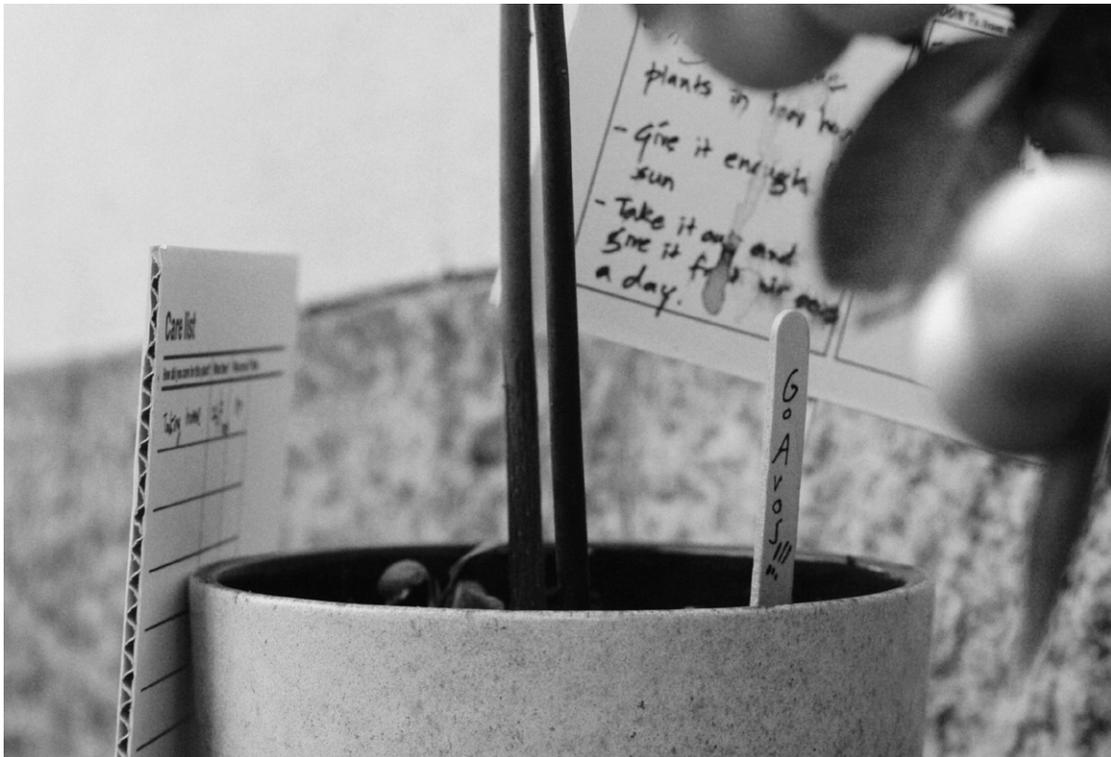
When entering and defining the situation, the visitor faced plants that needed water and displayed a variety of personal stories concerning them. The patterns of interactions with the plants were observed to be various and personal. When an owner checked in a diseased plant to ask for help, visitors supported by giving advice, playing songs, and leaving a note, ‘*Cheer up!*’. When an owner proudly shared how two branches had unusually grown from one seed, one visitor left a note ‘*Go Avos!*’ to give encouragement (Figure 17). When one owner wrote that the plant had been brought here to have a holiday because the owner’s boyfriend did not like it, one visitor left a note, ‘*You’re cute*’.

When owners showed visually appealing plants, like plastic-like leaves or bell-shaped flowers, visitors showed appreciation for the visual beauty.

Indeed, they were simple and mundane interactions (Figures 18-20). They neither told much about social structures nor required deep analysis. I cannot summarize the patterns of visitors’ actions, as people gave the most attention to beautiful flowering plants but also to humble seeds, and they rendered themselves as agents giving care and as spectators enjoying the green. If there was any common pattern, it was the attitude that visitors took these plant-related

stories seriously. It was a simple and positive moment when visitors expressed great empathy and kindness, responding to the unique stories that were told, the knowledge that was proudly shared, and the help that was sincerely asked for. When the visitor was negotiating ways of interacting with the plant, they were forming a response at a personal level to the particular piece of story they found themselves attached to. Thus, it was the unique and personal story that weakened the boundary of private ownership and sent out friendly and open gestures inviting communication. The essential value underlying these shared stories was craftsmanship, which refers to the individual engagement and imagination involved in the crafting of plants.

Figure 17: One visitor left a note 'Go Avos!' to give encouragement to the unusually strong life of a guest plant.







Figures 18–20: Visitors interacting with plants



# Chapter 5

Five Plant Hotels,  
Five Social Relations

I have presented the construction of the first Plant Hotel in a way in which I transformed the ethnographic insights drawn from *Paja* into my design consideration and practices in Plant Hotel. For continuity, I used the same concept of collaborative care for plants to explore other kinds of social relations emerging from four other social settings. Each Plant Hotel has attempted to answer the second part of research question in this thesis ‘How can service design provide opportunities for people to develop meaningful social relations?’ in each specific social setting. By engaging people in collaborative care for plants, what meaningful social relations would be created? The five Plant Hotels investigated five types of social relations: those between neighbours, between professors and students, between hosts and guests, between the elderly and other citizens, and between South and North Koreans (Table 2). Although intervening in a localized social place, they attempted to ask the broad question ‘How shall individual/group A treat B?’

In this chapter, I will present the empirical data for the five Plant Hotels from two perspectives: how the Plant Hotel was constructed by the designer(s) and how it was taken by local participants.<sup>23</sup> The first perspective refers to design considerations and practices, including targeting and creating the social relations, strategies of engaging local members with the service, and material configuration of the physical place and staging of plants. Each Plant Hotel was constructed with a pre-determined service rule of ‘A watering B’s plants’ targeting one specific type of social relation. The way in which the intervention was constructed was conceived and developed based on the designer’s understanding of the distinctive characters of the targeted social relation and the borders of the social structure that has formed and supported the type.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore,

it indicated the designer’s hypothesis of ‘what could be meaningful’ in the local context. The second part ethnographically looked at ways in which local people interacted with and interpreted a service that required a new type of social relation. By analysing the practices generated around the service encounters, it examined the following aspects: what meanings the locals created, what stances they

<sup>23</sup> The fifth Plant Hotel does not include field data as it is a speculative design concept.

<sup>24</sup> Ideally, the designer should have a relatively sound understanding of these relevant aspects. In order to gain such an understanding, some ethnographic study of the local context and participants is needed. However, looking back on the four constructed Plant Hotels, very little pre-study was done. Most weight was given to ‘what is happening’ in the field of intervention. The design work would benefit more from a closer look at the place and people beforehand, for instance, better strategies of engaging local people and better and deeper understandings of ‘what can be meaningful for the local’. Therefore, I acknowledge the limitations of my work.

developed, how they reflected or re-examined themselves, and what established norms were challenged.

Although each intervention embodied the designer's stance, it did not aim to implement or promote the hypothesized meaningful social relations. Nor did it seek confirmation or negation from participants. Instead, by taking an open-ended and provocative orientation, it aimed to stimulate and promote more voices from different perspectives. Thus, Plant Hotel was less interested in providing definite answers to 'what is meaningful'. It focused on providing an opportunity for people to discuss 'what can be meaningful and what cannot'. Overall, we can understand that both sides, through constructing the intervention and through interacting with and interpreting the intervention, together explored the questions of 'what is meaningful' and 'why is meaningful'. This approach of the ethnography of design intervention is outlined in Section 6.4 with more theoretical components.

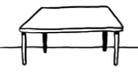
Plant Hotel					
Social setting	In a neighbourhood gallery, Helsinki	In front of the professors' office, Helsinki	At an academic conference, Stockholm	In two elderly service centres, Helsinki	At the border of North and South Korea (speculative)
Enquiry	How shall we treat our neighbours?	How shall we treat our professors or students?	How shall we treat our guests?	How shall we treat the elderly?	How shall North and South Koreans treat each other?

Table 2: Five Plant Hotels, five social relations

## 5.1. Shifting the Aims of Plant Hotel: From Micro-utopian Realization to Provocative Dialogues

The first Plant Hotel was intended to construct a similar service to the bicycle workshop. The aim was to set up a model that carried values and patterns of conduct to be promoted and achieved. The concept of peer collaboration was more conceptualized as an ethical model to be promoted. Following an aim of this kind, consequently, I had a clear script of how participants should act in the intervention. Following the script, I put most of my effort in employing various strategies, including material configuration, and direct acts of enforcement in the field, to encourage the formation of the expected actions from participants. There was a strong intent to change participants from passive spectators into active caregivers. I also wanted to encourage new modes of sociability among neighbours through this communal place. It was a process of community-building.

After the first Plant Hotel, I critically self-reflect on my practices in the project, which directly led to a shift of the aim of Plant Hotel later on. To realize expected actions indicates a closed end in the process of enquiry. It means that during the project, I held an imposing focus on what people should do rather than a curious attitude about what people would do. Indeed, when you set up an intervention, you cannot avoid having assumptions about what will happen. To be more precise, I am critical of the ethical judgement of the actual practices that some were more appropriate or expected than others. The focus on what should happen led me to be blind to what was actually happening. I found my intellectual pursuit located in exploring the new and unknown rather than changing or correcting people's behaviours.

The critical self-reflection orientated me away from model realization and value promotion. In the other three projects, I was less interested in promoting anything. In the second Plant Hotel, I did not suggest that professors should water students' plants. This new possibility was not a solution or a better model concerning the social relation between professors and students. It was a designerly way of articulating one characteristic of the social relations. With this aim, I had no expectation that professors should water, or students should bring plants, or any ethical judgement on actual practices. It turned out to be a provocative statement to challenge the hierarchy of social

relations rather than a preferred and improved model to be promoted or realized. The fourth Plant Hotel had dual aims. The elderly service centres saw this intervention as a desirable happening for their elderly customers to spend time on. They called it the '*urban gardening party*'. They carried the responsibility for engaging customers to water and not kill the plants. On my side, the aim was to pose a provocative question, 'Can we ask the elderly for help?' within the broad discussion how to take care of the elderly in a welfare society. My work was not to recruit participants or to transform the elderly from being customers into being capable agents. In the ethnographical research of the intervention, I focused on the investigation of emerging practices and articulated meanings from both the elderly customers and the centres. We can see that the new possibility of peer collaboration was constructed for discussion and reflection instead of realization or promotion.

## 5.2. Plant Hotel 1: How Shall We Treat Our Neighbours?



Figure 21: Plant Hotel 1 in a neighbourhood gallery: 'Plants need you!' to discuss how we shall treat our neighbours

In summer 2014, the first Plant Hotel was opened in a neighbourhood gallery in Punavuori (Figure 21). The gallery space was located on a street with residential buildings and some retail stores and design studios. People who appeared in the public space were mainly walking on the pavements towards a destination, parking their cars, or shopping. What if there was a public place where neighbours could do something different? We constructed this social place to propose a possibility to the passers-by and neighbours that they could water other people's plants when they walked on the urban streets. Engaging people with the watering not only aimed to discuss different ways of interacting with our neighbours, but also different roles and

behaviours in the urban space. We made the appeal, ‘**Plants need you!**’ as a contrast to the advertisement, ‘you need X’ that commercial establishments usually use to attract customers. It also followed the metaphor of a ‘hotel’ where plants are ‘guests’ and humans are ‘service staff’. The first Plant Hotel focused on constituting the new possibility of an active form of participation in the neighbourhood by bringing people’s capabilities and contribution to the centre.

The meanings of the guest plant and the place that were together constructed through the actual practices of participants have been described and analysed in Section 4.3. I have presented the emerging and possible quality of the social lives of participants in Plant Hotel. Next, I examine the reflective aspect. I analyse how the new possibility of watering other people’s plants challenged the normative role. Any rejection of watering is analysed to investigate the critical distance between the new possibility and the present, instead of being seen as a threat or failure of the concept of peer collaboration.

During its one week, Plant Hotel received 134 visits. During the first couple of days, participants were mainly passers-by who ran into this new situation during their daily routines. After the third day, when the project was reported on by the biggest local newspaper, many people paid a visit after they read the news. Here, I focus on passers-by who had difficulty in producing the action of watering plants. I first present a vignette, *A lady with a blank face*, describing how her normative role was challenged when she was forced to engage with the watering action.

### Vignette 3 | A Lady with a Blank Face

On the second afternoon, a middle-aged woman walked by. When she was approaching Plant Hotel, she noticed the place full of green. She slowed down, watching the plants placed outside on the pavement.

I approached her: *‘It is a hotel for plants. When you go travelling, you can check in your plants.’*

*‘Wow, that is a really nice idea!’* She got excited and raised her volume, *‘I just came back from my holiday. All my plants are dead.’*

I introduced her to the plants one by one,

*‘These are the checked-in plants. These are the stories shared by owners.’*

*‘These eggshells are used as organic fertilizer,’*



*'This owner asked visitors to take a photo of his plant and send to him,'*

*'These are Japanese shiso herbs, and she was willing to give away seeds'.*

*'Oh, lovely!'* She bent down, read each storyboard carefully, and giggled while I was telling these stories.

I gave more direct hint for the formation of watering act, *'All the plants are watered by neighbours who walk by. I don't water the plants. So if you walk by and see a dry plant, you are most welcome to water the plants.'*

She quickly formed a response, *'Oh, very sweet! It is a neighbourhood-based idea! Nowadays we really need this kind of service.'*

*'Exactly!'* I was happy she had got this idea so quickly. It seemed I did not need to try further to involve her in the watering as she might do it by herself.

I waited for a while. She was still immersed in the interesting stories written on the 'plant story' boards. When I realized she had checked almost all the plants and was about to leave, I decided to intervene with her: *'This is the care list, where caregivers leave their names and date after they water, in order to give hints to the next caregiver. As you can see, this one has not been watered for a long time. And it is dry'.* I pointed at the plant that she was watching.

*'Bad,'* she turned to me and gave an expression of pity, showing her sympathy with that dry plant. And then she was about to walk away.

She did not take my implicit suggestion into account to develop further interactions with the plant. So, I decided to adopt the most direct demanding means, *'Can you water this plant?'*

She looked at me with a blank face. During that moment, she could not catch any clue to produce an action responding to my (almost rude) request.

Being stared by a bemused face, I realized my sudden request had disrupted the habitual behaviours as a gallery visitor she had already comfortably established in Plant Hotel since entering it. Facing my expedient strategy of dishabituation, she failed to redefine the situation. I had to explain further: *'As you know, it is a neighbourhood-based service. Neighbours bring plants and other neighbours water them. So we want people to meet and hang out'*.

She listened carefully and said, *'I know'* as if she had no difficulty in understanding the aim and values of the project. *'But, how can I water? I don't have water'*. She went back to her confused face.

I handed her a water bottle that was just next to her, an object which she did not take into account when she was defining the situation. The lady poured some water onto the plant that I had asked about and gave the bottle back to me immediately without checking other plants. I said, *'thanks'*, which was the end of our conversation. She smiled back and walked out.

This conversation scene is extreme. However, the failure for visitors to associate themselves with the watering action was widely observed, even though some were directly told to do so or some understood the concept literally. It turned out to be more challenging than I ever expected to engage passers-by with watering, although the act itself is simple. Among the passers-by who gave opinions about this service, all regarded it as providing a good solution to their daily problems. It is much easier and quicker for people to interpret a new possibility from the perspective of service recipients who need help, just like the lady portrayed in the vignette above.

We responded to 'the blank face' with enforcing, actually, as I did in the vignette, where I directly asked the visitor to water. In the field, we gradually developed a strategy of giving a short introduction as soon as they entered the situation. The process included introducing the concept, giving a list of tasks (including giving a song for the plants, choosing your favourite plant, and watering the dry ones), and leaving them on their own. This strategy could help visitors who showed 'the blank face' to define the situation in the way

I expected, and at the same time, provide some private and autonomous space for them to act on their own, for example in deciding which plant to interact with and how. I found the most effective part of the strategy was giving the visitor tools to act with, like a watering bottle, pens, and post-it. Sometimes, as described in the vignette, people were still confused when they were directly told to water plants. However, when you hold a watering bottle in your hand, you more easily render yourself as an enabled agent with the capability to offer help.

### 5.3. Plant Hotel 2: How Shall We Treat Our Professors or Students?

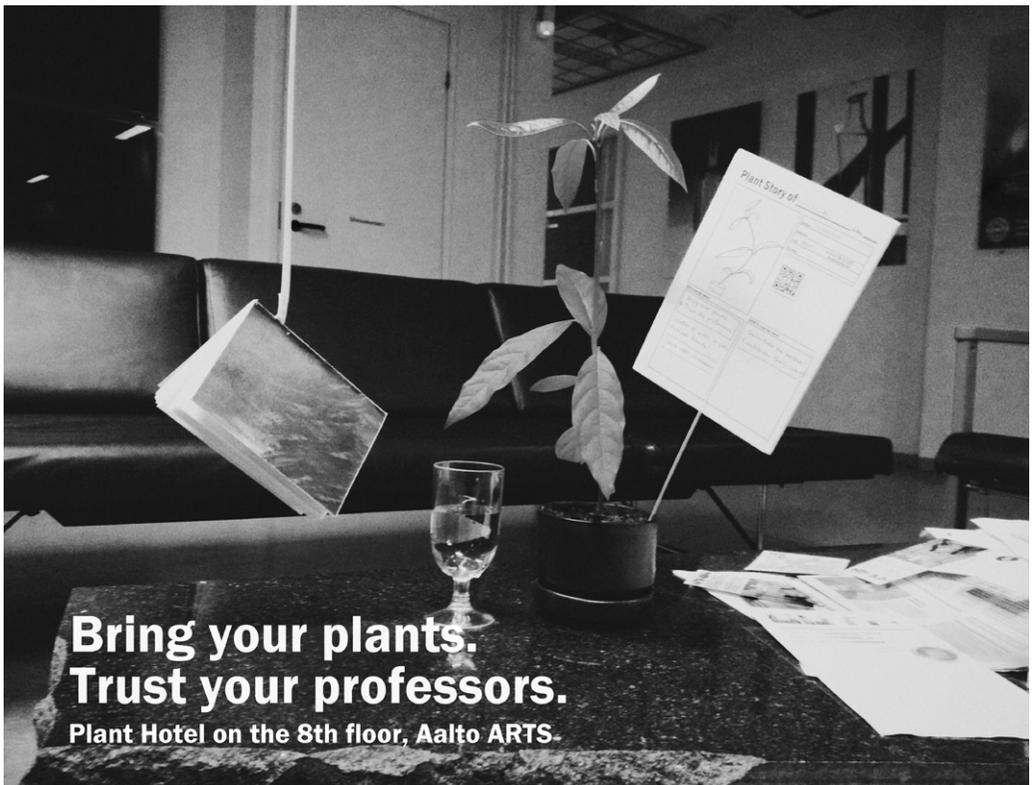


Figure 22: Plant Hotel 2 in front of the professors' office: 'Bring your plants. Trust your professors!' to challenge the hierarchical relation between students and professors

The second Plant Hotel was opened in a resting space in front of the professors' office in my school (Figure 22). The office is an open space with several tables not separated by any partitions. It holds five professors from the Department of Design. It is entirely transparent to visitors due to its large glass windows and doors. Thus, having guest plants in front of the transparent glass windows, the professors could not avoid paying attention to or noticing them. Forcefully bringing the highest visibility of plants to the professors can be read as an obligatory invitation to associate the professors with the guest plants. By sending out the invitation to students with an explicit sense of subversion and rebellion, **'Bring your plants. Trust your professors!'** it aimed to challenge the hierarchical relation between the professors and students. Is a distant relationship between professors and students necessary or important? Is it true they are always busy? Can we ask them to water students' plants? Will they care? Will any student take this invitation to subversion? My intent was neither to problematize the hierarchy nor to change the relations. Rather, it was more to communicate and reveal the character of this type of social relation through provocation. It was by proposing a possibility of subversion and impossibility, which was realized in the intervention with the rule that the professors could not shift the responsibility if a guest plant died. It aimed to raise awareness, reflection, and dialogue around this issue. Through this informal and playful channel concerning plants, it intended to provoke conversations between professors and students which otherwise would not happen. Just during the first day, a professor asked me, *'Are you putting up a critique that we don't come to school often?'*

During the almost one month of the intervention, apart from the plant from me, one professor brought a pot of flowers and watered my plant once. None of the other professors offered help, although they checked the plants now and then. Confronted with the challenging statement, they related the plant to a challenging gesture rather than to a life to give care to. They insisted maintaining, or even strengthening, their social position by refusing to water the plant. When a professor met me in the elevator, he asked me, *'This morning I suddenly realized the plant is still green. Unbelievable. Are you watering secretly?'* He strategically challenged my challenge by making a clear claim about his indifference to the plant. One even explicitly told me, *'I don't care about the students' plants. I have more to worry about, which is their study.'*<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> I did not strategically collect data in this quick and small experiment. As I introduced in the method chapter, my way of data collection in Plant Hotel 2 was documenting the discussions when people approached me. As no student approached me to express their opinions, their thoughts and reflections are missing.



## 5.4. Plant Hotel 3: How Shall We Treat Our Guests?



Figure 23: Plant Hotel 3 at a conference hosted by a design school: ‘Choose the right school for your plants’ to play with the competitive relation among the schools in the community

The third one was a five-day experiment at an academic conference hosted by a design school in Stockholm in June 2015 (Figure 23). The conference was held just after the spring semester ended and the school became empty. Meanwhile, conference participants from more than 30 schools and five continents occupied the place for several days. This was about a story that guests interacted with the plants left in school from the students and staff. The ideal and easy plan would be that the watering took place during the guests’ school tour. When they were visiting the studios and departments, they could water plants along the corridors or in the open spaces. However, the tour was not organized by the school, and it required keys to enter each floor. Thus, three days before the conference, I went around the school and collected plants into the conference exhibition space.

The biggest design challenge in this project was to make the conference participants care about the plants. To achieve that, it was important to understand what they care about when presenting at a conference. The profile of a conference participant includes their research topics, number of publications and citations, last name, job position, and affiliated institute. Usually, the personal academic identity is closely related to the institutional identity. In addition, the aims in attending an academic conference refer to publishing work, networking with fellow researchers, and seeking inspiration. Thus, a guest plant should have relevant symbolic values, and the watering act should be about more than just maintaining the plant.

My engagement strategy was asking each plant owner to **'Choose the right school for your plant!'** among the 30 schools that had publications at the conference and also to give a reason that was written on a wooden board displayed alongside the plant. The participants from the chosen school were titled as caregivers for the plant. It played with the competitive relation among design schools by borrowing education logic for plants. Plant Hotel served as a dialogue platform for guests to reflect on how their schools were seen by the students and researchers from the Stockholm school, either in a serious academic or casual manner, and to facilitate networking.

The simple interface played with multiple layers of different types of social relations. Participants from different backgrounds interpreted and interacted with it in different ways, as they found meaningful. I will present three accounts from three types of participant.

She is a design researcher from the local school. She checked in her plant from her office with a small note: *'I hope the small plant can start global and big conversations'*. She chose a design school from Africa as the caregiver because she liked the sustainability education programme there. The professor from the African school, who was also her friend, watered her plant and initiated a conversation with her with, *'Hi, I just watered your plant'*. However, later on, she expressed her complicated feelings:

*'I have mixed feelings. The positive part is that I asked him to water my plant because I like his school. It is a friendly gesture to start a conversation. The negative part is that I feel like I was outsourcing my labour to my guest, which is not very nice. Especially, the sensitive part here, if in a broader sense, I, a white woman, outsourced my labour to an African man who is from far away, is that the right thing to do?'*

He is a researcher from Copenhagen. He noticed none of the Danish schools were chosen by Swedish plant owners. He looked around the plants and found a parched one. He decided to water it even though his school was not chosen as the caregiver. Moreover, he put his school tag on that pot.

They are local students. They walked past Plant Hotel and watched the plants for a while. They thought these plants had been abandoned and left in the school when the semester ended, and I had collected them into the middle of the big exhibition hall to display publicly the students' carelessness about plants. They interpreted the service in which conference participants water the locals' plants as a critique that the survival of the plants had to rely on help from guests due to the original owners' irresponsibility.

These are three types of participant: a plant owner (also a researcher, a host, and a white woman), a caregiver (also a Danish researcher), and local members who were aware of the plant-related issue in this school. The platform of 'A watering B's plant' sparked reflections, with different social meanings emerging from relevant contexts.



## 5.5. Plant Hotel 4: How Shall We Treat the Elderly?



Figure 24: Plant Hotel 4 in the elderly service centres: ‘Can we ask the elderly for help, what and how?’ to reshape the relation between the elderly and other citizens

### 5.5.1. Plant Hotel entering the elderly service centres

In the fourth project, Plant Hotel was integrated for the first time with institutions (Figure 24). When planning it, I contacted the service sectors of three kindergartens, two primary schools, a cancer hospital, and two elderly service centres. Apart from the elderly centres, all rejected taking in a Plant Hotel with the same reason: that it might increase the workload of the employees who are already over-loaded. The two elderly service centres, *Kaa* and *Koo*, agreed because they found watering plants was ‘*Something nice for our customers to do*’ and ‘*It is nice to have some green*’.

*Kaa* Centre, located in the city centre, is a building of three floors with open access. *Koo* Centre, in a neighbourhood district one kilometre from the centre, includes both a service centre and an elderly home with almost 80 residents. *Kaa* and *Koo* are both run by the local government to improve the quality of the social lives and well-beings of the elderly. The customers are retired seniors who can use services from eight o'clock in the morning to four o'clock in the afternoon on weekdays. The centres organize a variety of social events, including craft workshops, yoga classes, and concerts, and provide services such as cafés, restaurants, and a library.

In a social situation where the retired elderly receive services and help, the constructed intervention subverted the order, so that the elderly needed to help others and give care to plants. Within the broader discussion on how we should help and take care of the elderly in the welfare society, I posed the question: **'Can we ask the elderly for help, what and how?'** I intended to provoke discussions about rethinking the relation between the elderly and other citizens, and also their role regarding capabilities after retirement in the contemporary society.

To make watering a natural thing for the elderly, the organizers of both elderly service centres decided to open their Plant Hotel in the café area, which already held rich social relations and interactions. Regarding the material configuration of the physical space, both wanted to keep it as integrated with the original café space as much as possible. One centre decided it was enough just to put up big signs with PLANT HOTEL at the entrance. The other also put some magazines and books about gardening on the café tables. Unlike requiring the participants to leave information on the 'storyboard', like giving playful tasks and sharing stories, in the first exhibition-framed Plant Hotel, we kept the interface simple and open. One side was blank for plant owners to leave any message they wanted and the other side was for caregivers to write down their names and watering dates. In this project, I added one object, exploring meanings and practices relating to 'exchange'. I put a box at the information desk for plant owners to leave anything they liked for the caregivers or the community. In order not to constrain the ways in which local members created meanings of exchange in non-monetary collaborative services, I rejected the name 'donation box' or 'thanks box'. Instead, I chose a confusing and ambiguous name – 'the Box' – with additional text: *'If you want to give something to the caregivers, please put here'*, which aimed to encourage various and open interpretations (Figure 25).

The two Plant Hotels opened for more than two months from June to August 2015. *Kaa* Plant Hotel was open in a mixed area with a café and library (Figure 26). *Koo* Plant Hotel was open in both the café area and the common living room in the residential building (Figure 27). *Kaa* received 46 plants in total, from four staff, four elderly customers and three outsiders (who were young citizens), and *Koo* received 43 plants in total, from three staff, six elderly customers and four outsiders. Five young people checked in plants as a result of their interest in visiting the elderly community, otherwise they would not find a reason to.

Next, I discuss how the institutions and elderly customers interacted with the new possibility and what matters of concern were articulated. The analysis focuses on the critical distance between the new possibility and the institutional structure of the intervened-in social setting.



Figure 25: The entrance to *Kaa* Plant Hotel: plant-related magazines, flower-shaped paper decoration made by an elderly person, 'the BOX', guestbook and notice board



Figure 26: The plant 'rooms' in *Kaa* Plant Hotel, combined with library space



Figure 27: As well as in the café area, Plant Hotel was also open in the common living room in the residential part of *Koo* Centre, where the elderly residents with substantial assistance needs gathered for social events.

### 5.5.2. The institution's discomfort: *'No, we cannot leave things to chance!'*

Initially, both centres accepted Plant Hotel to integrate into their service structure as they particularly appreciated the innovative way of involving customer participation.<sup>26</sup> By engaging the elderly with collaborative care for plants, they intended to activate their customers and engage them more with the community. The head of *Koo Centre* explained,

*'We have talked a lot about how to make our customers active. We usually organize craft workshops and dance concerts. Watering plants is a new way, simple and pleasant. So now there is one more thing for our customers to do here. They would love it, especially women. Also, I guess they will be happy to help others.'*

Moreover, she saw it as specifically valuable to activate their 80 customers living in the nursing home. As almost all need much assistance with daily living, there are not many social activities and events they are able to participate in. Watering a plant is relatively simple, not requiring complicated embodied skills to perform and complete independently. If people brought plants to their common living room, it not only would make the space more vibrant and delightful, but would also bring the elderly residents positive experiences with regard to a sense of independence and achievement.

However, the head of the centre became confused when she started to plan the care for guest plants.

*'Anybody whoever visits the café or the common living room can water the plants'.* I attempted to make the process sound easy.

*'Anybody? But who?'* She sounded concerned about the randomness. The same concern occurred to the other centre. The organizer had earlier thought it was an easy task as it was just like *'an urban garden party,'* where all the customers could join. However, when she discussed the maintenance in more detail, she felt more and more uncomfortable:

*'We don't know who will water and when. Or even we don't know whether anybody will water or not. This is too dangerous. We have never had this situation before.'*

This form of collaborative care left the whole matter in uncertainty. It directly challenged their consistent way of providing services and interacting with customers. *'Shall we trust our customers?' 'If nobody waters, shall we let the plants die?'* The two institutions adopted two different ways to approach this challenge.

<sup>26</sup> The Helsinki Service Centre Operation's Development Programme (Helsingin kaupungin sosiaali- ja terveystoimisto) sets 'customer participation' as one of the key areas to improve in 2014-2016 (cited in Meriläinen, 2016, p. 17).

After meeting with the employees and volunteers, the head of Koo Centre decided to re-orientate Plant Hotel's means of engaging customers in such a direction that the centre would have full control over the situation, *'No. I don't think the idea anyone who is around waters will work. The service has to be well-organized.'*

*'What would you mean by well-organized?'* I cut off.

She further explained,

*'It should be made clear that, for instance, "this plant is your responsibility," "you do this!" We have to know who will water. If the person can't water the plants, we need to know. Then we can arrange another one, who we are sure will water.'*

Rejecting the watering as coming from the customer side, the institute arranged two volunteers to water the plants strictly according to the schedule both had agreed on. Plant Hotel was transformed into a service to fit within the institutional structure, in that it delivered the service with full control and responsibility, and customers were merely recipients. In the end, all plants were taken good care of, and the owners were happy and left boxes of sweets and thank you cards. The result was precisely what the institution expected. The uncertainty factor, the collaborative care from the customers, had been removed completely.

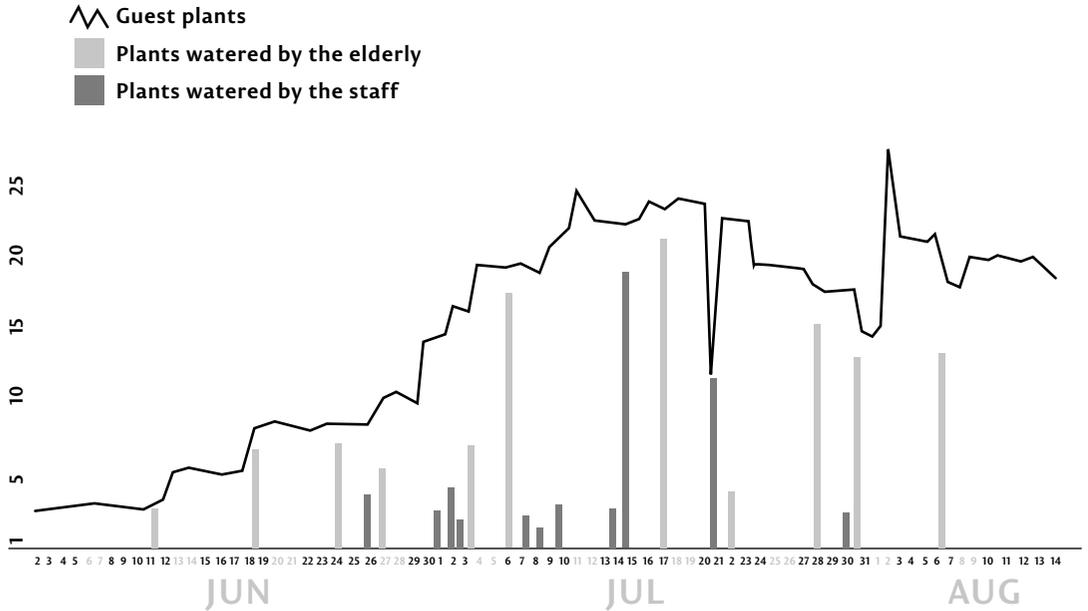
Kaa Centre also changed the concept with an institutional intervention. Answering the debate, *'Shall we let our customers water?'* or *'Shall we let the plants die?'* among the employees, the head said,

*'The principle is we should not let plants die. People trust our institution to bring their plants. We cannot let Plant Hotel tear the trust down. However, at the same time, we love this idea, so we should ensure enough space for our customers.'*

Thus, they agreed they should constantly check the plants, and only when they found a plant that was very sick or dying, would they water it. The watering pattern of the employees (Graph 1) was they only watered one among many. Sometimes, they secretly poured out the water of overwatered plants. As part of the collaborative care, the institutional responsibility was to prevent the worst scenarios. Their participation lay in the back stage, giving the front stage to the elderly, so that the institutional intervention would not discourage the customers' participation. In all, Kaa Centre provided institutional support as a safe bottom line to the collaborative care with the element of uncertainty.

## The watering in *Kaa* Plant Hotel

Some people who were seen watering plants did not write down their names on the 'carelist'. This part is missing in the diagram.



Graph 1: The watering process in *Kaa* Plant Hotel: as some people who were seen watering plants did not write down their names, this diagram is not complete. However, still, customers were much less active in watering than the organizers expected.

After the project ended, the head of *Koo* Centre expressed her dilemma,

*'We said Yes and then said No. It shows how we think inside our organization. We want to activate our customers, but we don't trust them. We are learning. It takes time.'*

The collaborative service in Plant Hotel conceived a new mode of sociability and new agency of the elderly, which directly shook the service logic of the centre as a sole service provider.

### 5.5.3. The institution's reflections: Mixing ages

Plant Hotel provoked the organizers to examine their own centres with fresh eyes. One main critical reflection, referring to the fact that there is only one age in the elderly service centre, is *'Why are places made to separate people?'* Looking back to Plant Hotel, one organizer mentioned the nicest thing that happened was she saw one Asian-looking young man checking in two plants. One old lady became curious about his plants and cut two branches to grow at home.

*'It is, really, really nice to see Plant Hotel brought young people to our centre.'* She said this was unexpected, even though she knew that *'anyone can check in plants'* literally according to the principle of Plant Hotel. She further explained,

*'We don't want to see only the elderly spending time here. We want other ages to come as well. Our customers always want to get connected to young people. Somehow we are an open centre that everybody can step into. The library, cafés, and restaurants are open to everybody. All the activities are open to whoever wants to join in. Of course, I understand it is not an attractive place for young people. It is uncool to dance with old people. I think the only reason young people come by themselves is to use the free toilet. But, at least there is something we can offer.'*

This separation of ages is recent in human history, appearing in modern industrial societies where the state and institutions take over the social functions of traditional families and kinship. One fact contributing to the social isolation of the modern elderly is retirement (Diamond, 2012, Loc.3988). In Finland, citizens over 62 and 68 years old leave their work environment due to the national retirement policy. To take care of the pensioners, the government builds a set of specialized facilities with the aim of improving the quality of their lives and developing their potential. The customers of the two service centres being studied, which open from eight o'clock in the morning to four o'clock in the afternoon on weekdays, are the pensioners socially isolated from the work world. Events and activities are mainly tailored for and targeted to one particular type of person. The positive side is the elderly are better served based on their distinct needs and capabilities. The negative side is that the place is made to separate the elderly from other ages.

The separation is built by the institutional boundary. Plant Hotel, with its primary aim to connect people, enabled the new practice that young people visited the elderly service centre. This design intervention managed to push the boundary. *'Why are places*

*made to separate people?’* When the organizer started to ask this question, the effort within the boundary was attempting to look for new possibilities to break the boundary.

#### 5.5.4. The watering act challenging the routinized role of a service customer

##### Vignette 4| *‘No, I did not water the plants.’*

On the first morning when *Koo Plant Hotel* was open, an old lady arrived, gulping and yet joyful, with 20 pots of plants and flowers behind her, *‘it is such a lovely idea that the centre is helping us to water the plants. Now I can free myself to enjoy the summer!’*

When she was filling in the check-in form (Figure 28), I approached her. *‘For your information, actually, the centre or volunteers are not responsible for the plants.’*

She appeared puzzled, raising an eyebrow, *‘Then who will?’*

Figure 28:  
The elderly woman  
who brought 20 pots  
was checking in.



*‘The customers, whoever visits the café, like you, could and should take care of the plants! So, the plants will be watered by the community’.* I specifically emphasized ‘like you’ at a slower speed.

Her eyebrow remained raised, ‘*Oh, really?*’ Then it came to a long pause. It seemed like she had little past experiences or expectancies to understand this idea.

*‘The whole idea is about when you come here to have coffee, if you see a plant next to you is dry, you can give it some water drops.’* I decided to directly bring the lady into the scenario to make sure she got the idea.

‘OK’. she seemed to understand literally what her role could be in Plant Hotel, *‘I just saw some plants there that were dry. I thought it was a volunteer’s job, and I should not bother. Now, I see. I will give them some water later’.*

After Plant Hotel had closed, I sent her a text message, *‘Did you water any plants?’*

She replied, *‘No, I did not. It did not occur in my mind because they were in a hotel. I think they were taken good care of, although once or twice I found some plants did not have water’.*

I was surprised she had not, especially after she told she would. I typed immediately, *‘Why did you not water them?’* However, I did not send it. I did not want to sound like I was blaming her, and she did not deserve it. So I sent instead, *‘Thank you for bringing beautiful flowers to Plant Hotel. Hope they enjoyed their stay’.* She may have already given the answer implicitly that she believed that the hotel, not her, should take care of the plants and she had difficulty in associating herself with the hotel.

## Vignette 5| *‘What does it mean by anyone can water?’*<sup>27</sup>

*‘I think the communication should have been clearer! I didn’t really understand Plant Hotel at first and many others had the same problem,’* she replied.

*‘Not understand?’* I blurted out, as the answer surprised me utterly. I would expect that people were not interested in participating, but never expected people would not understand the concept.

The lady explained, *‘On first reading the poster, I got the idea that we could bring our plants to the café when we went for a summer holiday, and the centre would help to take care of them. But later on, someone told me the centre did not do it.*

<sup>27</sup> The conversation was part of an interview I had with an elderly woman who checked in her plants to Kaa Plant Hotel. I was asking her how the service should be improved.



*Then I got confused: if the centre would not water our plants, why were they asking us to bring plants?*

*'The idea was that customers of the centre take care. It is a community-based service'. I was disappointed that she still had this confusion when it was clearly written on the poster that the customers would take care of the plants.*

*'Yeah, right, customer,' she nodded, 'This is what the people at the info desk told me'. However, the answer did not make the idea any clear to her: 'But who should do it?'*

*'Customers, like you, like anyone who is a customer of the centre'. Now it was my time to get confused. Since the answer 'customers' was clearly given, why she was still asking 'who?'*

She still felt confused, *'Any customer? We didn't know who should water, who could water, and how?'*

I was losing patience. I was getting frustrated why such a simple idea appeared so obscure for her. I could not offer any better explanations but repeat the same sentences, *'Just anyone, anyone who wants to water, anyone who happens to see a plant that needs water ...'*

*'Alright, I get what you mean, anyone'*. She was getting frustrated as well, probably, with the fact her question 'who' was yet to be answered. *'By asking who, I mean, any particular fixed person?'* Her eyes suddenly glistened, as she found herself, finally, able to articulate her confusion clearly, *'I did not know, at that time, who were the responsible people for watering the plants [...] until I saw one of my friends watering them. Now I get it, anyone can water'*. When she realized her answer was also 'anyone', she shrugged, *'Anyway, the communication should be improved so we know anyone of us should and can water. It is a confusing idea!'*

When planning the project, we were optimistic about the active participation of the elderly with watering. The organizers had long noticed many of their customers were enthusiastic about gardening and actively attended gardening-related events: *'I am sure they will love this project! You have no idea how much those grannies love plants.'*

The second reason was that we believed that the negligible workload of watering would not discourage participation. Once, I asked one plant owner whether he was worried nobody would water his plants. He shook his head assertively,

*'No, not at all! Many people are visiting the café every day, right? So how could it happen? They just need to give several drops when they are having coffee. That is what I love about the idea the most, the effortless work from some gives a big help to others.'*

Furthermore, we were confident with the social fabric of the café, where many elderly visit regularly and have developed a sense of ownership over and attachment to the place, which we all expected to lead to solicitude towards guest plants. A place like a public park or a tram carriage might have too loose a social structure to support care practices to emerge.

Nevertheless, the reality was the opposite. Very few elderly people negotiated themselves into the watering in both cases

(Graph 1).<sup>28</sup> The woman portrayed in Vignette 4 actively engaged herself in the new service by bringing her

<sup>28</sup> However, the extremely passive watering in *Koo* was largely influenced by the institutional intervention, which has been discussed in Section 5.5.2.

20 pots. 'Bringing plants to get help' did not challenge her routinized role of a needy customer served and helped by the centre. While she lacked skills and knowledge in associating herself with Plant Hotel in the way in which she could contribute to help others. And the lady described in Vignette 5 was not alone. Almost all the elderly interviewed complained about the difficulty in understanding the idea and our failure of communicating it clearly. Based on her background expectancy, she assumed the means of participating in watering would be through designation. The texts we used for communication, 'Anyone who is around can water the plants' and 'The plants will be watered by the customers of the centre' on the poster, the direct invitation 'Dear customer, you are invited to water the guest plants' and also the watering tips for the elderly on the 'notice' board, failed to provide adequate clues for many elderly people to generate new practices of volunteer watering.

Let us also have a look at the elderly who participated as caregivers. What were their ways of associating themselves with the watering, and what supported and framed this new practice? In *Kaa* Plant Hotel, among the caregivers who wrote their names on the 'care list', Emma was the most active and committed caregiver, who did the most amount and persisted from the beginning to the end of the service (Graph 1). Emma's watering was initiated by an informal talk with the manager, who happened to meet her playing pool next door to Plant Hotel and asked whether she could help to water the plants when she was around. After this initiative, these elements stabilized her watering practice: she loves plants; she has been a frequent customer for eight years and now is also a volunteer at another café; the plants are just next to the pool room where she plays with her friends almost every day; watering does not require much time or effort.

However, if the manager had not asked Emma, would Emma have participated in the same form? Could there have been another Emma? How did other caregivers, who did not write down their names, decide to water? We do not know the answers. All we can learn is that it is not as easy as many of us expected to engage people with watering. Being physically around is not enough. This indicates that the watering act did challenge some certain norms in the elderly service centres. Then, what are the norms? What constrained an elderly person from giving some water drops to the plants next to them?

As I mentioned above, the collaborative service seriously challenged the normative behaviours characterizing being a service

customer of the elderly centre, about the role of being taken care of and ways of participating in events. The elderly visit the centre to receive services for personal well-being. It was difficult for many to accept or understand the staff or volunteers were not responsible for the plants. Many were still confused by this idea even after we explained during the interviews, *'You are telling me they don't do it? Then who should? Me? Why should I?'*

Rather than watering, most elderly people interacted with Plant Hotel by going to the info desk to say how much they liked or disliked the idea, leaving comments in the guestbook, watching and talking about the plants, or bringing plants to get help.

Moreover, the approach of participating with Plant Hotel as 'people who are around water' challenged the institutional structure of participating in an event. Watering other people's plants refers to a type of volunteer work. Moreover, in the centre, participation as a volunteer is through the institutional structure, which is usually assigned through a weekly meeting with staff and volunteers. The form 'whoever waters' is random without being pre-planned or scheduled. Nobody would be particularly appointed. The fact of who would water and when would be left to chance. We learned in Section 5.5.2. that such randomness distressed the institution, and also confused the customers. Emma's participation was initiated by an informal talk with the manager, which we can claim is still through the institutional mechanism. Consequently, the challenge of engaging the elderly with watering does not refer to the work itself. Rather, it is about breaking the boundary of the routinized role of a service customer or the institutional structure of becoming a volunteer.

Nevertheless, are there possibilities to break the boundary? My answer is optimistic. The fact that very few elderly watered the plants does not mean they did not care about the plants or the community. One elderly person brought her plant even though she was not going on holiday because she was worried nobody would bring plants. While watering was not chosen as her means of participation, *'Nah, I don't need. Emma was taking care of them. I trust her.'*

Once, when one employee went to check the plants, one lady sitting at the coffee table told her, *'Don't worry. Emma just watered them this afternoon.'*

This indicates that the community were aware of the plants and recognized and appreciated Emma's role as a caregiver. Thus, it may not be fair to claim that the elderly acted merely as passive service customers in pursuit of their well-being. Instead,





the community organized itself in its most comfortable way towards the maintenance of plants, and watering might not be the most familiar way. However, the watering process was starting slowly as more people understood the concept and a few more were seen watering the plants later. It evolved through the circulation means of word-of-mouth among community members.

### 5.5.5. Emma, who watered other people's plants

Emma was an elderly participant who watered plants the most during this intervention. I have been thinking whether I should write at least a few lines about her, even though she did not appear interesting as an informant for my research. Her watering act was initiated by an informal talk with the manager and later on became stable for several reasons. She did not see any social or exchange value in her watering act or in Plant Hotel as a service. She did not see her work as particularly valuable to anybody or to the centre. Her attention was only on the plants. In the interview, she appeared excited when she was talking about the plants: it was an overall nice experience to inspect, recognize, and look after various plants and flowers. But when it came to the questions relating to the social aspect, like *'Have you met any plant owner'* and *'Did people talk to you when you were watering the plants'*, they did not even interest her as a topic to think or talk about. She leant back in her chair, without even bothering to remember the conversations.

I conducted this Plant Hotel in the elderly centre, hoping to bring a sense of connection or achievement to the elderly. Ironically, Emma, who helped with watering the most, saw her watering act as a lone and personal activity. During the interview, when asked to describe her experiences of watering the plants, she picked the metaphor cards of 'picking mushrooms alone' and 'relaxing on the beach alone'. The meanings she rendered to the act were rather personal, *'It is good to stretch my legs now and then. It gave me another reason to get up and walk a bit.'*

Emma is in her early eighties and has been a volunteer in the centre in catering services for almost eight years. She visits the centre often, as she said she has many friends to hang out with. Emma rendered herself as a participant who was only attentive to plants and did not have further reflections. However, it might be already important that Emma and some other caregivers enjoyed the new possibility just simply as they enjoyed plants.

Figure 29: The location of Plant Hotel 5



SOUTH  
NORTH

Panmungak Pavilion

Freedom House

Peace House

Plant Hotel

[UNCMAC Conference Building]





Figure 30: Plant Hotel 5 at Panmunjom, the border of North and South Korea: 'how shall North and South Koreans treat each other?' In this Plant Hotel, a South Korean soldier is standing, staring at the North Korean soldiers.

## 5.6. Plant Hotel 5: How Shall North and South Koreans Treat each Other?

Plant Hotel 5 opens at Panmunjom at the border of North and South Korea from May 2020 (Figure 29). It is a ‘hotel’ and ‘adoption centre’ for plants. Visitors from both sides can bring their plants and leave them there, and also can water and adopt checked-in plants, even those from the other side. This service intervention is initiated along the easing of Korean political tension since 2018, the year when the President of South Korea Park Geun-Hye, during her last year in office, pays an official visit to Pyongyang, the capital city of North Korea. Although there has been no official move since Park’s visit, it has largely raised public hopes for more dialogue between the two sides. Now two years afterwards, Panmunjom, as the only cross-border site, is providing a new service Plant Hotel that encourages dialogue between the two sides through plant exchange and collaborative care. This service is initiated by the United Nations Command Security Battalion<sup>29</sup> (UNCSB) and received agreement from North Korea. To give a bit history, the Korean Peninsula has been divided into North Korea and South Korea along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel North since World War Two. In 1953, the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was created by Armistice Agreement among the United Nations, China, and North Korea. Both sides ceased fire and moved troops back 2km from the front line, therefore a buffer zone 4km wide was created. Within the DMZ, there is a small area called the Joint Security Area (JSA) where Panmunjom is housed (Figure 31). Panmunjom, crossing the two nations, is the only place where the North and the South armies meet face to face. For about a decade, Panmunjom has been open for public visits both from home and abroad. It has grown into one of the most popular tourist spots in Korea. In Panmunjom, there are several blue barracks where meetings between North and South Korean officials take place. They are also the only indoor places that traverse the two sides. One of the barracks, the United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission (UNCMAC) Conference Building, known as the ‘blue room’, is open for public visits. Plant Hotel opens in the ‘blue room’. It is a meeting room with a long table in the middle crossing the border, two small tables near the door on each side (Figure 32). The windowsills are the ‘plant rooms’ for each side. There are in total eight soldiers guarding inside Plant Hotel,

<sup>29</sup> The UNCSB is responsible for maintaining the JSA so as to provide a safe environment for meetings between the South and North to happen. They also provide security for all personnel within the DMZ and tourists who visit Panmunjom.

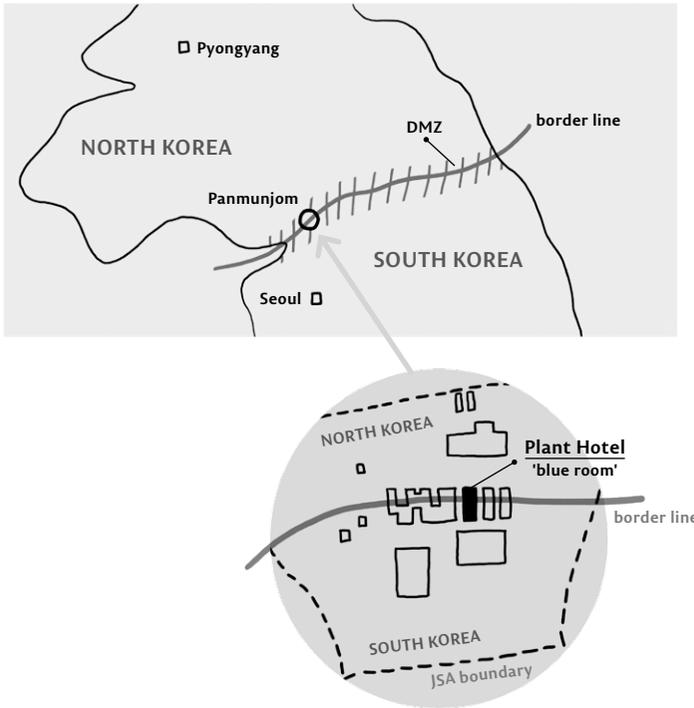


Figure 31: Map of the DMZ, JSA, and Panmunjom

four from each side staring at each other. In Plant Hotel, visitors are allowed to step into the other side freely, water and adopt checked-in plants. Plant owners can also leave messages on a small piece of note board attached to each plant, like the rule in the previous Plant Hotels.

The service of plant adoption and watering in Plant Hotel is constituted of a set of strict rules based on the United Nations Command (UNC) Regulations. All rules are clearly announced in the news report (Preface). The rules of visiting on tours, applying in advance, bringing a passport, and dress code apply to everyone who visits JSA. The regulations relating to checked-in plants, like no pot and 48-hour phytosanitary tests are to prevent danger or unexpected situations that plants might bring. The plant height limit is to ensure adequate window sight of the 'blue room' for the forces from both inside and outside. In line with the rules of the previous Plant Hotels, a 'storyboard' is provided. However, the messages will be censored due to the sensitive political context. After the opening, the first plant that Plant Hotel receives is from an Australian English teacher working in Seoul. He is interviewed by the local newspaper (Preface) and leaves a review on the travel website (Figure 33). Some other visitor reviews are illustrated in Figure 33.

In the following paragraphs, I will examine the particular meanings of the acts of checking-in, watering, and adoption and further the 'plant' in this political cross-border context. As we have learned from the previous Plant Hotels, the service concept is described as 'it is a hotel for plants. People can bring plants when they

## NORTH KOREA

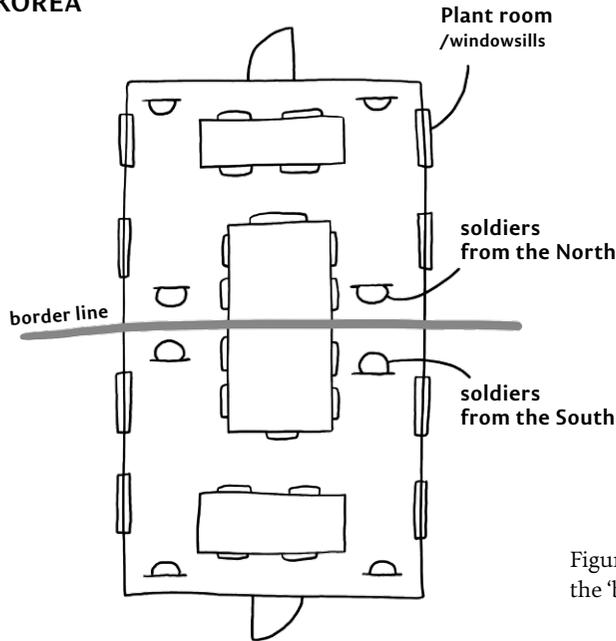


Figure 32: Map of Plant Hotel in the 'blue room'

## SOUTH KOREA

are away. And people who are around can water the plants? Firstly, the motivation of participation in whatever form does not address the daily problem that plants are left alone at home when the owner is away for a holiday. The motivation is related to interest in the political issues of inter-Korean relations and the Cold War, or the personal experiences of family or friends being separated by the border. It becomes a political act. The political border at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel North is meant to divide the Korean Peninsula into two parts, controlled by two different systems of political ideology. Therefore, two nations are in an antagonistic status and people, materials, and thoughts cannot travel across the border. However, the DMZ was created to cease the fire and Panmunjom was built to provide a secure environment for meetings between North and South. Therefore, different from the meanings of the border, Panmunjom has played a role that facilitates dialogue between the government offices of the two sides. Now, the new service of Plant Hotel takes this role further, aiming to facilitate dialogue and exchange among people. In this political context, interaction with plants represents personal willingness and effort in challenging the political discourse and taking the political division towards a direction of resolution.

Secondly, the effortless and almost random act of 'being around', in this context, becomes a long and complex procedure composed of a set of strictly regulated practices obeying the UNC Regulations. 'Being around' is in fact an institutionalized act. Constrained by political circumstance, it does not happen that one

# Reviews of Plant Hotel at Panmunjom

Paju, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea



OW

Visited May 2020 ●○○○

I took the plant from my students in Seoul. All signed on the note card. wondering who would adopt our plant...



Kim Minja

Visited May 2020 ○

Panmunjom is a reminder of the past that continues. The plants are the reminders that the past can stop here.



Yoon

Visited Jun 2020 ○○

Can never imagine watering a plant can be that exciting, and full of tension!! Surveilled by 4 soldiers standing next to you!!



Nu...ari

Visited Jun 2020 ●

There are two lines of plants, each line from each side. I stepped into North Korea. I told the soldier I gonna take one plant. Amazing... Actually you can really go to North Korea, and take something as you wish, and come back to South Korea!



Winn...stone

Visited Jun 2020 ○

Enh, one side of plants come from the communistic side, and the other from the democratic side. But, they look the same, no difference.



...alse

Visited Jun 2020

A bizarre idea! Who wants to water plants in that heavy armed site!



transpotting

Visited Jun 2020 ○○

It is not an easy Plant Hotel. A lot of rules to follow, like no shorts no skirts...One idiot was wearing jeans and was denied to get on the bus. It was not funny! This was as serious as a heart attack!



...

Visited Jun 2020 ○○○○○○

Watering plant is the highlight of our JSA tour. The moment we crossed the line, stepped over North Korea and watered the plants from the other side, made it all exciting for my kids and us!



Visited Jun 2020 ●○○○

It is not a Plant Hotel that you can just go, water plants and enjoy the green. You can only visit through tour with strict military rules. A lot of rules that you would never understand to follow for the sake of plants...The living relic of Cold War!



Visited Jun 2020 ○○

I saw a plant with a note written the owner's name, birth date and place, and his brother's name, birth date and place. Oh, don't wanna imagine the story behind it.



Visited Jun 2020 ●

When you take your plant, it is not checked in immediately. It goes to the phytosanitary lab. When I gave it to the soldier with white uniform, sunglasses and mask, for a moment, I thought it was a bomb. An eerie feeling!



Visited Jul 2020 ○○

The best part of our tour is the messages left by plant owners. I saw a card written 'hello' next to an armed soldier. Oh, that HELLO!



Visited Jul 2020

If you are looking for peace and green there, you'll be disappointed. You only feel tension. You even feel the tension from each leaf.



Visited Jul 2020 ●●●●●

We four in a group. We all decided to take one plant from the other side. When we entered the blue barrack, we directly walked to the South side, took the plant, and left the room. Wow! It feels surreal. In a room where you feel like you are not allowed to make any gesture or touch anything, we actually 'robbed' the plants right under the nose of those soldiers without being arrested!



Visited Jul 2020

There was a 87 Y/O woman from Paju in our tour. She came with her son. She said she is moving to the elderly house soon, and wants to give away all her plants to the North. But only one plant per person is allowed to check in.

Previous

1

2

3

4

5

...

10

Next

Figure 33: Two pages of visitor reviews of Plant Hotel at Panmunjom on a travel website

is around Panmunjom by chance. It requires deliberate planning and accurate organization enacted by various actors from designated travel agencies, the army forces of the UN, South, and North Korea, and visitors themselves. In addition, 'being around' can be interrupted anytime if any of the rules are not followed precisely or an unexpected situation arises at the border.

The rules and practices mentioned above give particular meanings to the 'plant' in multiple layers. Firstly, the 'plant' represents the gesture or will from people who wish to change the political antagonism and division. Secondly, the 'plant' is an artefact of the messenger, especially delivering information and voices from the North that is yet to open to the global media. The 'storyboard' attached to the plant becomes a window to an unfamiliar, exotic, and distant world. Thirdly, rather than weakening it, the 'plant' reinforces the contentious character of this political site. The presence of the plant is the result of complex political regulations and procedures. Watering the plant is under the surveillance of eight armed soldiers. The South Korean soldiers especially reject delivering a friendly and relaxing image. They stand in a taekwondo-like position with an apathetic facial expression, clenched fists, and black sunglasses (Figure 30). When one owner brings a plant and hands it to the lab expert, he describes the institution treating it like a 'bomb' (Figure 33). Therefore, Plant Hotel delivers a mixed and contradictory atmosphere of antagonism and cohesion. As illustrated in the visitor reviews, some feel the tension rather than enjoying the green. Fourthly, the plant that is chosen as the only artefact of exchange between the two sides has its special character. Unlike other man-made artefacts, the 'plant' that exists outside the socioeconomic system does not show the economic disparity between the two sides. One plant owner from the South explains the appropriateness of the role of plants in the exchange,

*'When there is a chance that I can give some gifts to the North, what artefact should I choose? I would not want to bring any ready-made products from South Korea. These industrial products reveal our economic and industrial development situations. I heard people in North Korea have quite a bad life. It's not good to show the gap. But a plant is rather neutral. It's from nature. It's equally shared by people, poor and rich. To some extent, it shows equality.'*

Above, I have presented Plant Hotel at the border and the fictive meanings it is associated with. Unlike the other four, it is a speculative

service concept that is not constructed in any real context. The writing of the speculative Plant Hotel is based on the following data: the UNC Regulations on JSA visit, 200 reviews of Panmunjom visits on a travel website, field photos of Panmunjom taken by visitors, and five interviews with South Koreans.<sup>30</sup> The subjective visitor reviews of Plant Hotel were written based on the 200 visitor reviews and five interviews with South Koreans. Drawing on the data, for many visitors the highlight of the tour is the visit to the ‘blue room’ where they can step into South Korea. Many expressed the excitement of stepping into the other side or just simply watching North Korean soldiers from a distance. I attempted to gain empathic feelings for their excitement in the ‘blue room’ and overall experiences of the tension in Panmunjom so as to develop fictive experiences and opinions of Plant Hotel. It is worth noting that most of the 200 visitors were from Western countries and all visited Panmunjom from the South side. There is no information available online about how to visit Panmunjom from the North side. From Chinese websites, I learned that Chinese tourists visit, although no comments or experiences are shared online. I am fully aware that the visit experience of Panmunjom and as well as the meanings created from the service vary dramatically for people from the two different socio-political contexts. Therefore, due to the partially available materials, the concept has been constructed with the perspective from the North missing. This is rather a pity, otherwise it would create a sound discursive place where diverse voices from two contradictory sides would meet.

This speculative concept is about neither utopia nor dystopia. It takes the manner of writing a practical project proposal with full consideration of the rules in reality. Therefore, Plant Hotel is firmly integrated with contextual political practices, as the rules of visiting Panmunjom are entirely based on the UNC Regulations<sup>31</sup> and the fictive rules relating to plants are composed following the same manner. These rules, in turn, constitute the central concept of this service intervention and characterize the ‘plant’ and the fifth Plant Hotel. Moreover, to make it appear closer to reality, I devised the fictitious political environment for Plant Hotel to emerge in 2020, after the South Korean President Park Geun-Hye’s official visit to the South in 2018. It would be reasonable to imagine

<sup>30</sup> Among the 200 reviews, there are none from Koreans, and I could not find any reviews from Koreans. In order to gather first-hand experiences and opinions from Koreans, I reached five South Koreans at my convenience, although they had never been to Panmunjom. I asked them to imagine what they would act or think if the project really happened. The quoted account is directly taken from one of the subjects.

<sup>31</sup> To explain briefly the dress code, the UNC do not allow visitors to wear hippie, worn-out or over-informal clothes because they are afraid that North Korea will take photographs and use them in political propaganda to promote the ‘poor’ image of South Korean people or Westerners.



Park might take active action towards the resolution of the Korean Peninsula issues during her last year in office in 2018.<sup>32</sup> If there were any fictive or ideal quality in this speculation, the largest would be the interest in dialogue and exchange from the two nations.

The fifth Plant Hotel asks ‘How shall North and South Koreans treat each other?’ through suggesting a new possibility of plant exchange and collaborative watering at the border. Growing from the previous four interventions, it continues to carry their provocative and discursive nature, and becomes more ambitious in challenging more complex and broader social issues. In the fifth case, I intend to push the boundary and explore the potential of Plant Hotel addressing social relations. Therefore, by the means of speculating, I take it to an extreme context, which is the most contentious political border that connects two nations that are still at war status since the Cold War.

Here, due to the methodical difference from the other four, I frame Plant Hotel 5 as a side case, which is not included as an empirical case for the theoretical development in Chapter 6.

<sup>32</sup> Contrarily, now this part has become the most fictional one, which has been approved impossible in reality. In October 2016, two weeks after my composition, unexpectedly, scandal relating to Park was widely covered by the media. And in December 2016, South Korea starts the impeachment process of Park.



# Chapter 6

A New Position  
of Service Design  
Engaged with  
Social Relations

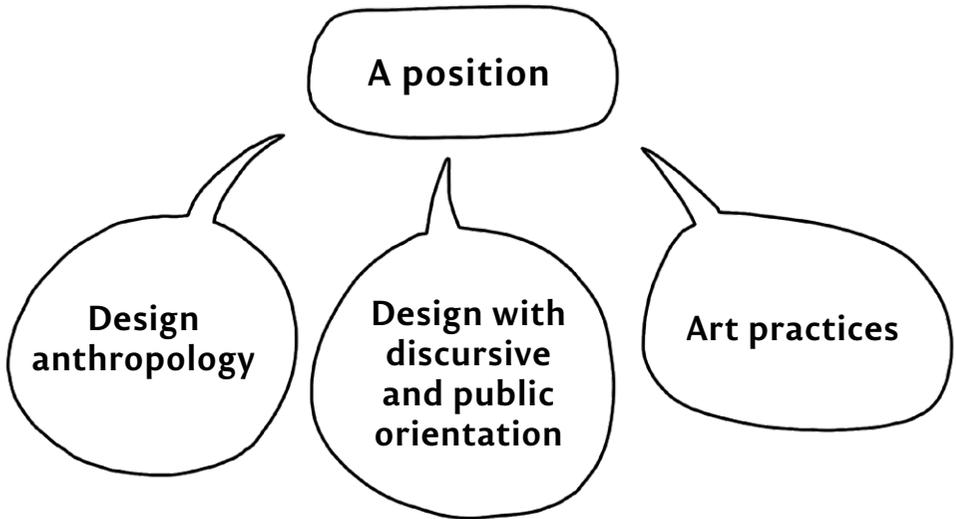


Figure 34: The position of design engagement with social relations is built on the practices from three design and art-based fields.

## 6.1. A Position: Constructive Investigation of Social Relations

As I asked in Chapter 1, what social relations do we want to have to deal with daily needs and affairs? With whom do we want to work? Is there any possibility or potential to develop meaningful social relations in services outside institutional and monetary mechanisms?

In this chapter, I outline an approach for service design to contribute to this topic (Figure 34). This approach also answers the second part of the research question of this thesis: 'How can service design provide opportunities for people to develop meaningful social relations?' By answering 'how', the thesis wishes to propose a new methodical position for service design in the relational field. The position takes the constructive approach. This means that, different from a sociological investigation, this position investigates social relations by engaging with new possibilities through interventionistic and experimental means.

This position draws on the data of the single service concept of Plant Hotel. Regarding the need of maintaining plants, Plant Hotel has been seeking new possibilities outside product consumption or professional service delivery. The service of watering plants meets one specific daily need and has specific characteristics. The watering act as a type of work is extremely simple and almost effortless. The workload cannot be compared with other work like cooking or baby-sitting. In addition, the price of failure is low. Despite the limits of studying one

case, the study sheds light on how service design can help people to look for new social relations they find meaningful.

This proposed position does not aim to provide direct answers to ‘What are meaningful social relations?’ Instead, it creates opportunities to support and provoke people to look for and negotiate with the social relations they find meaningful (and not). Then, if not for providing answers, for what should new social relations be designed? The position argues that the social relations to be designed do not need to be solutions or preferred models. They can even be related to subversion or dissensus, as the aim is to provoke awareness, reflections, or debates through which people look for answers by themselves. The new social relations can be used to shake and reshape existing social relations and boundaries, which serve beyond the quality or the completion of services. Thus, a service requiring new social relations becomes an enquiry into issues of social distinctions and boundaries or sensitive political treatment. The task is promised in Section 6.2.

This is the public and discursive orientation that the design practices in this proposed position take. By intervening new social relations into people’s daily routines, it constructs the public where matters of concern are articulated through the processes of participants interpreting and interacting with the constructed

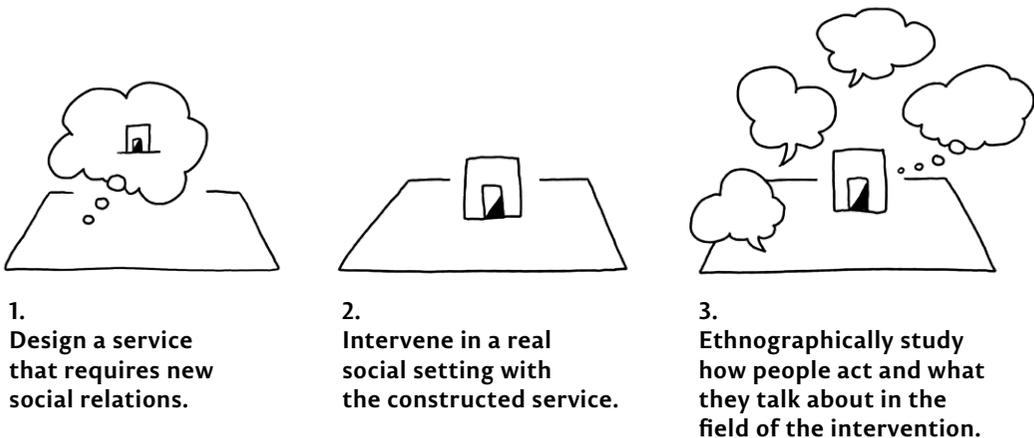


Figure 35: Three stages in the process of the ethnography of design interventions

service. In Section 6.3, I will first review three sites that designers strategically use to construct the public, and then outline the site of the ‘constructed services’ that this position uses.

The design of services that require new social relations is the first stage in this position. The other two stages include intervening the constructed service into a real social setting and engaging people to interact with the new possibility, and ethnographically studying what people do and talk about in the field of the intervention (Figure 35). The mode of enquiry in this position is the ethnography of design interventions developed from Joachim Halse’s paper, *Ethnographies of the possible* (2013). It is a combination of the interventionistic approach and ethnography. One important characteristic of this mode of enquiry is that the investigation takes two perspectives, the speculative towards the new and the reflective towards the old. That is to say, it is attentive to both the emerging and existing characteristics of social relations. In Section 6.4, I will discuss what kinds of knowledge are produced and how they are produced from the mode of ethnography of design interventions.

## 6.2. Social Relations in Services and Beyond

### 6.2.1. Four meaningful social relations artists argue they create

In this position, when designing services that require new social relations, what are the new social relations and at whom should we aim? My design engagement with social relations in Plant Hotel was largely inspired by art practices. They extended my pre-assumption of designing for preferred models and encouraged me to explore other aspects of social relations (more in Section 5.1). In this section, I firstly provide a review of the characteristics and quality of social relations that artists claim to create. The questions they ask are relevant to design when the aim of design is a piece of social relations. Some answers that designers are seeking have been discussed in the art field for many decades. What type of social relations should be created? Which aspect and what quality should be focused on? For whom and for what purpose should the relations be created? How can the depth

and quality of social interaction be assessed? What should the relation between the author and participants be?

The answers vary. Each artist treats social relations from different dimensions according to the specific aim. In this section, drawing from art literature, I present four types of social relation. The first orientates towards the consensus aspect to enhance social cohesion and harmony. This ‘therapeutic’ art tool has been largely used by governments to build better communities and to integrate marginal individuals. The second displays the aspect of antagonism foregrounded, which is to negate social injustice by representing the confrontation of systems. This type of work admires shocking gestures and artists’ absolute autonomous authorship and control over the artwork. To oppose the divisive effect of the ‘spectacle’ (Debord, 1970), the third seeks to create passionate and authentic experiences through constructing experimental social situations. The fourth puts dialogue and exchange at the centre, which opens up equally an exchange space between the artists and the engaged subjects. It is close to the form of activism, embracing bottom-up means of collaboration to resist conformity in top-down interventions.

## Social inclusion and harmony

In contemporary society, art is fulfilling religion’s role in binding people together. Artists go to communities and neighbourhoods to improve members’ lives. The strategies they use are often based on the ideas of gift-giving, generosity, and mutual help, to create consensus among participants and enhance social solidarity and inclusion (Grennan, 2014).

This approach enforces ethical values. The curator Mary Jane Jacob praises the ethical turn in art:

‘[I]t moved from an aesthetic function, to a design function, to a social function. Rather than serving to promote the economic development of American cities, as did public art beginning in the late 1960s, it is now being viewed as a means of stabilizing community development throughout urban centres. In the 1990s the role of public art has shifted from that of renewing the physical environment to that of improving society, from promoting aesthetic quality to contributing to the quality of life, from enriching lives to saving lives.’ (Kwon, 2002, p. 111)

Instead of creating shocking moments or exotic experiences, many artists choose to create a direct impact on people's lives. François Matarasso (1997) contributes to the wide recognition of the positive social impact when participatory art addresses social and cultural problems. He lists 55 social benefits in the aspects of social union, community empowerment and building, local image and identity, and personal development, health, and well-being. Many art projects are reported to make a significant contribution to bringing people together, especially in integrating the excluded into the mainstream. Through participation in local art projects, people made new friends and got to know neighbours (*'It helps to create a good social life and network of friends.'*), felt a sense of belonging (*'It's nice to walk down the road and be acknowledged by name by the children and parents.'*), reduced social isolation (*'I didn't feel alone anymore.'*), learned about different cultures (*'It was very valuable in breaking down barriers. It got people talking together who wouldn't normally sit down and talk.'*), and helped each other (*'I was becoming a typical moaning middle-aged zombie: now I feel needed.'*) (1997, pp. 26-28).

Used as a community-building mechanism, art becomes a means of moral disposition and value-finding (Lacy, 1994). Art is no longer free from morality, and 'having good intentions' becomes the focus (Hagoort, ter Braak, Beerman, & Weeda, 2005, p. 55). The judgement of such artwork enforces ethical values, for instance, whether it provides a good model of collaboration among participants.

## Antagonism

A coin has two sides. I have talked about the consensual aspect of social relations and now move to dissensus. I will start with two projects aimed at creating new social relations among gallery visitors, albeit with an orientation towards the opposite dimensions of social relations. Rirkrit Tiravanija's project looks at consensus (Figure 36) while Santiago Sierra's focuses on dissensus (Figure 37).

The artist Tiravanija cooked free Thai soup for gallery visitors in several art galleries in New York, including the prestigious MoMA. It created a social and relaxed situation with a club atmosphere where people ate food and had relaxed talks with strangers. If we look closer at this type of social relation, it is not difficult to find it was among a group of people who were all gallery-goers and art lovers, either living in or visiting New York. These means these 'strangers' are of a similar type of people, very likely well-educated, wealthy, and English-speaking. On the other hand, Sierra was sensitive to



Figure 36: Rirkrit Tiravanija cooking Thai soup for gallery visitors



Figure 37: 133 street vendors, originally from Senegal, Bangladesh, and China, are paid to have their hair dyed blond in a gallery hall at the Venice Biennale 2001 (project by Santiago Sierra)

the exclusions of the art space and represented it in his strategy of participation (Foster, 2003). At Venice Biennales, art communities and their audience arrive in Venice to visit excellent exhibitions. At the same time, there exists an indispensable group in the city scene, illegal immigrants mainly from Senegal, Bangladesh, and China. They remain invisible and exclusive from this art event, although they probably stand outside the venue gates and attempt to sell goods to the gallery visitors. In 2001, Sierra paid the street vendors whose hair colours were naturally dark, to enter the gallery and dyed their hair blonde.

Attempting to strengthen the boundary of existing social relations, Tiravanija's work constituted the supposition of benefits of social consensus. Attempting to break the boundary of existing ones, Sierra focused on the manipulation of antagonistic differences of social injustice. Bishop insists on the significance of revealing antagonism if we want to negate social injustice and rethink social relations (2006). Under the appearance of any harmony, contradiction and confrontation have been repressed. Due to the acknowledgement of the impossibility of a utopia, it does not shy away from producing trouble or discomfort. The explosion of tension provides 'a more concrete and polemical grounds for rethinking our relationship to the world and to one other' (Bishop, 2006, p. 79). It probes into a deep enquiry of the structural reasons for the broader social and political systems that have caused the antagonism and repressed the consensus. To maintain the artistic capability to provoke and awaken, it is necessary for art to invent new languages to reveal, or even exaggerate and double, the contradiction in social relations (Bishop, 2012, p. 275). Bishop further argues that antagonism is the crucial part in democracy, as a democratic society is one where all the antagonisms are constantly brought into debate instead of disappearing (2006).

## Experience-orientated: Authentic and experimental

*'The "critique of the spectacle" often remains the alpha and the omega of the "politics of art"'*

- Jacques Rancière (2008)

To understand why authentic and experimental experience-orientated social relations should be created, it is worth first examining the concept of 'spectacle'. In the 1960s, the French writer Guy Debord

wrote a book, *The Society of spectacle* (1970), claiming society is a consumer society dominated by spectacles. Although it is now dated, it has value in the theory of 'spectacle' about the relations between social relationships and commercial products. Debord states that spectacle does not mean images in a literal way, but the moments when our social relations are mediated by the images produced from commercial products. He stresses that we should understand spectacles as 'a weltanschauung that has been actualised, translated into the material realm – a worldview transformed into an objective force' (n.p.). This means that the perceptible world is replaced by the spectacle world, a set of images that often appear superior to real life. In his words, 'commodities are now all that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity'. Materially, the spectacle is 'the expression of estrangement, of alienation between man and man' (n.p.). People are addicted to spectacles, so they lose authentic life experiences and emotions. Their desires are pre-written by commercial institutions through the promotion of goods. Their sensibilities are dulled by spectacles. The daily experiences and social relations are totally manipulated by commodities.

Debord's concept of 'spectacle' which theorizes the alienating effect of capitalism provides an important theoretical basis for contemporary artists, especially those with socialist leanings, who put participation at the centre of their work. For instance, Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) chooses to take the 'spectacle' as the main reference in his book, *Relational aesthetics*, to form the argument for designing for new modes of social relations. In addition, the socialist art theorist Boris Groys summarizes the aim of participatory artwork as being to combat 'against contemplation, against the spectatorship, against the passivity of the masses paralysed by the spectacle of modern life' (2009, n.p.).

When artists agree that the world is conquered by the commodity form and the spectacle it generates, they further realize that the relation and communication between the presenter and the reviewer through an object is mainly appropriated by the commercial society. 'After all, nowadays one could receive an aesthetic experience on every corner', asserts the Dutch artist Jeanne van Heeswijk (2001, p. 175). Thus, just producing objects is not enough. They will be consumed by another passive bystander, just like one more piece of commodity. Instead, there must be an art of action, which involves authentic participation from people and direct engagement with art production. Art should move towards social relations, away from

beautiful objects, and towards action interfacing with social reality from the passive presenter-spectator process. Art should provide more than a spectacle. Art should act in encouraging a society where people are active and social bonds are repaired (Rancière, 2008). That is why participation becomes so important, in that it 're-humanises the society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalistic production' (Bishop, 2012, p. 11).

Debord's concept of 'spectacle' tells us that social relations between humans are not directly or authentically experienced. They become standardized artefacts. Responding to this problem, artwork serves as an experimental production of sociability with the emphasis on passionate, playful, convivial, and non-alienated experiences. New social relations seek detachment from normative orders and disrupt the uniformity and commodification of habitual patterns.

How have artists attempted to break daily habitual orders? The Situationists left rich legacies respecting techniques. They encouraged directionless adventures, playfulness, experiments, and game playing. One of their techniques, *dérive*, refers to random and unplanned walks through physical urban spaces, in which participants directly feel about the place, instead of from the top down or through market-driven needs. It is suggested that they leave behind their social roles and their usual motivations for actions during the *dérive* trip to create an entirely new and authentic experience. Such wandering expresses 'insubordination to habitual influences' (Debord, 1955, n.p.).

The work of the French artist Sophie Calle using detective means to encounter strangers contains a strong sense of randomness and openness (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 30). She followed a male stranger for one day and recorded his one day in Paris in the project, *Suite vénitienne* (1979). She carefully recorded each room after check-out when she found herself a job as a chambermaid in a hotel in *The hotel* (1981). She also invited friends and strangers to sleep in her bed for one night, took a photo of them every hour, and had chats now and then during the project, *The sleepers* (Calle & Macel, 2003).

In the project, *Oda projesi* (2001-present), artists rented a three-floor flat in Galata, a neighbourhood in Istanbul. They regularly organized events with the residents, whoever wanted to use the place in their ways. In one room, various events were organized, including cooking dinner, cutting hair, painting the wall, and drinking tea. They attempted to encourage the improvisational, tactical, playful, and creative use of communal public space (Lind, 2004).

The situation constructed in the artworks mentioned above can be seen as a 'social interstice' (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 16), which indicates a free space or period that is detached from the normative rules that organize our everyday life behaviours. A temporary situation conceives of different rhythms to encourage alternative types of inter-human relationships contrasting with 'spectacles'. Facing the standardization of social relations, artists create experimental and random social encounters to liberate people from the constraints of daily routines and rhythm and to explore the infinite potentials in human relations.

## Dialogue-orientated

*'What is time?  
If no one asks me, I know what it is;  
if someone asks me, I no longer know.'*  
- St. Augustine

The fourth type of social relations gives the most weight to dialogues and exchange with others. Grant Kester theorizes that collaborative art serves as a form of dialogue and exchange between artists and participants and also among participants (2004). The locus of the dialogic dimension of new social relations encourages participants to speak back to the artists and the artwork. Moreover, the judgement lies in the quality and characteristics of the piece of dialogue itself. Thus, the artwork becomes the facilitation of dialogues. Artists become creative facilitators who can listen and empathize with difference instead of self-expressive agents (p. 8). The aim of the dialogic relationship follows the avant-garde tradition of challenging fixed identities and perceptions. Refusing the shock strategy, Kester argues that the encounter and exchange with others can powerfully leave people to wander, doubt, and reflect (Ibid.). As he cites Augustine's words: 'If no one asks me, I know what it is; if someone asks me, I no longer know', dialogues with others open up the space of 'the risk of doubt and uncertainty' and of 'the possibility of an opening out to the other' (Kester, 2008, p. 60). It is 'the vulnerability of intersubjective exchange' in dialogic art that catalyses change in the consciousness and challenges what people used to be sure about, rely on, and take for granted (p. 60).

In order to be a good facilitator of dialogues and exchange in a given social context, Kester proposes a different image of artists

whose artistic identity is heavily based on their capacity to listen and empathize (2004, p. 24). This mode of field enquiry strongly carries the tradition of ethnography. First, artists should partly give up their authorial control to achieve commitment to an open and equal dialogue with participants. This indicates that artists should neither address an already formed perspective or vision, nor impose their own values on participants. The values are formed through the bottom-up means of collaboration rather than through conformity in top-down interventions. The second key element is 'empathic identification', which can facilitate 'a reciprocal exchange that allows us to think outside our lived experience and establish a more compassionate relationship with others' (p. 150). Helguera Pablo notices the most successful site-specific art projects are often those where the artists have long periods of immersion with the place and people (2011, n.p.). The curator and critic Lucy Lippard (1997) summarizes eight tips for how artists can capture the complexity of a place and produce provocative work among engaged community members: artists should learn as much as possible of people's lived experiences, desires and skills, and the particular context; be open-minded enough to difference and variety; produce artwork that is familiar enough not to repel people and unfamiliar enough to provoke people (pp. 286-287). All in all, in the field, artists produce artwork through the capabilities of facilitating dialogues, listening and understanding, and moreover, analysing critically (Kester, 2004, p. 118).

I briefly introduce two art projects that served as dialogic devices with the co-design researchers will find familiar. In 1994, a conversation was arranged on a boat for a three-hour cruise on Lake Zurich by WochenKlausur. People from four backgrounds, politicians, journalists, activists and prostitutes, were invited to talk about drug-addiction issues in Zurich. In the same year, several cars were arranged in the car park in Oakland by Suzanne Lacy and her team. One teenager was invited to be seated in a car, and other residents entered the car to talk. Later on, police officers and local media joined the conversations as well. In the car, the teenager could self-present their image instead of a stereotype under the manipulation of the media. In both projects, the artists creatively facilitated the conversions through creating a situation with a less formal structure beyond fixed identities and discourse. They encouraged participants to give up the default protocol and to achieve interesting exchanges that catalysed transformation in subjectivity (Kester, 2004, p. 8).

### 6.2.2. New understanding of social relations in services: Beyond mutual help

I have shown four types of social relations that artists argue they create, responding to these questions: what social relations are meaningful to create, and for whom are they meaningful? What art strategies should be used? And what should the relation be between artist(s) and participants?

These are crucial questions in design, as well. Before discussing these questions, I would like first to state that the initial influence of these art practices on my design practices of Plant Hotel were that they opened up a new realm outside the solution-orientated tradition. In the new realm, the concept of collaborative care for plants is not necessarily related to a preferred model to promote or a solution to problems. It indicates new purposes and new outcomes of designing for new social relations.

The new purposes led to a big change in the enquiry, which looked deeply at the possible various meanings of the act of watering other's plants and, furthermore, the social structure and factors that characterize this act. When we talk about people helping each other, who are the 'people'? When a professor helps water their student's plants, the new act indicates more meanings than one individual helping another in meeting a daily need. Looking at the border context in the Preface, what does it mean when a North Korean waters or adopts a South Korean's plants in the contextual political discourse? Taking another example, what discussion will be provoked if local residents bring their plants to a refugee camp when they go on a holiday? We learn from these service concepts that the act of watering other people's plants goes beyond the pragmatic idea of meeting daily needs. This means that the service design does not serve the service itself. Rather, it becomes an enquiry into issues of social distinctions and boundaries or sensitive political treatment. Following this goal of issue articulation, the new social relation to be designed goes beyond the functional role in services and sets up enquiries into the complexity of the broader social, economic, and political structures that have shaped and influenced the characteristics of the targeted social relations. With such enquiries and analysis, the meanings of new social relations in services are given richer layers, multiple dimensions, and probably more depth.

When I moved away from aiming at creating a preferred model of mutual help in a general context, I started to explore what the meanings of mutual help could be in each particular context. As

I described in ‘five Plant Hotels, five social relations’ in Chapter 5, the social characteristics of the ‘people’ who collaborated in services are taken into consideration as the central element of the design concept. In the first Plant Hotel, the targeted participants were ‘neighbours’. However, I soon realized the ‘neighbours’ living in the urban context of Helsinki were closer to ‘strangers’ who did not know each other before and probably would not meet again after Plant Hotel. These are not the type of neighbours in a close primitive village or a politically and socially bonded squatted building. Strategies were employed to evoke playful and experimental experiences (described in Chapter 4). This exhibition-framed service attracted people who were interested in plants. The patterns of new social interactions were plant-centred, like the personal and authentic stories and experiences shared through the designed objects of the ‘storyboard’, or short and casual talks about self-introduction and plants among people who met in Plant Hotel (Section 4.3). This type of sociability is similar to the social atmosphere created in the gallery where Tiravanija provided free Thai soup. It can be characterized as ‘pure sociability’, a term from Georg Simmel (1949). He appreciates that people just get together without any particular purpose, and the purity is beyond social context and social roles and is close to the notion of democracy. However, the second Plant Hotel did not create a place where professors and students could sit down and talk about plants happily beyond their social roles. Their social roles were reinforced rather than weakened. The act of helping with the watering directly addressed the hierarchy. Following the art argument in the approach of antagonism, revealing tension is also meaningful compared with the ameliorative approach where a hierarchy might be defined as a problem and a solution proposed to create inclusion.

Designers can not only learn from the direct answers each approach of art practice gives to the question, ‘what is meaningful, for whom and how to create it?’ Designers can also learn from the criticism each receives. Artists taking the first approach of aiming for social cohesion sometimes need to respond to the ‘therapeutic’ image they receive. The ‘cohesive moment’ created in often short-term art projects is regarded as superficial without really challenging or changing the social structure (more in Section 6.4.3). The second with the spirit of the avant-garde is criticized due to the stubborn appreciation of the shocking effect of artwork and the position of artists as radically autonomous geniuses. There, artists have complete control over the structure and form of the artwork and

participants are manipulated merely as an instrumental element (like the street vendors in Venice whose hair was dyed blond). In the third approach, the theorization of consumers as slaves of commodities over-emphasizes the effects of social structure and refuses to see the active, tactical, and creative agency of individuals. Contemporary studies of consumption have become mature, regarding consumption as a relatively autonomous sphere of action, through which individuals reinterpret and transform cultural meanings in countless ways (e.g. de Certeau, 1984; Miller, 2005). The fourth approach of dialogic art has the risk of slipping into populist communication, 'a generalised set of ethical precepts' (Bishop, 2012, p. 23).

One important discussion these criticisms indicate is 'How should (not) be participants configured in the work?'. When participants are reduced to passive zombies with dumb feelings, the author (either artist or designer) might carry the responsibility for activating and correcting them, like the Situationists using *détournement* and *dérive* to provoke authentic and non-alienated experiences. However, when participants are respected as experts on their own lives and experiences who can actively think, reflect, debate, and catalyse a change, the author would be more likely to position themselves less in the superior messianic role, and the relations between authors and participants would become more equally collaborative and dialogical.

When reflecting on the project of dying hair blond, I cannot stop thinking about the participants' voices? When the street vendor got his hair dyed blond in the gallery hall, what would he tell his wife when he went back home? Would he just tell her how much he earned from a project that he did not understand or care, or start to reflect on his identity in the city or the blondness? Would the blond hair bring a change in his life? What discussions would be evoked among the street vendors whose hair was dyed blond and between others whose hair was not? If we want to engage local people even more, we can introduce the spirit of co-design by inviting street vendors together to design what kind of service they want. However, referring to the criticism of 'populist communication', how should we avoid producing a proposal like '*We want free lunch*' but instead constitute a powerful component from the participants? To respond, Kester holds a compelling argument that listening and empathy do not mean uncriticality or simple submission to individual desires. Most importantly, the author should be open-minded and sensitive to the context

studied and the participants, and meanwhile, critically analyse and reflect (Kester, 2004).

By presenting the criticisms, I have no interest in getting mixed up with art debates or arguing which approach is more superior. Besides, there are no easy or standard answers. And they should be treated accordingly in each specific context. Most importantly, by reflecting on them, designers can learn how to produce high-quality work and avoid producing bad work. For instance, when a preferred model needs to be designed, does it have superficial engagement with the problem or does it touch the deeper social structure? When the author intends to open up the work towards the participation of people, how open should it be? How much control should the author have in order to deliver meaningful outcomes and fruitful discussion, but at the same time provide open and flexible space for participants to express their authentic voices freely?

## 6.3. Constructing Publics Through Service Design

In this last part I extend the purpose of designing for new social relations in services. On the one hand, design sets enquiries into the broader structures that have formed and characterized the targeted social relation. On the other hand, it creates opportunities for participants to negotiate with the social relations among themselves. Beyond merely functioning as a practical part of services, the new social relations also take a discursive and public orientation. In this section, I discuss how service design constructs publics where matters of concern emerge. I will firstly review three strategies designers employ for the articulation of social issues.

### 6.3.1. Reviewing three design sites in articulating social issues

For decades, designers have developed a new frontier for design, which is beyond design's utilitarian, commercial, or style functions. There have been increasing recognitions and explorations of the value of design in articulating social issues (Blyth & Kimbell, 2011; DiSalvo, Lodato, Fries, Schechter, & Barnwell, 2011). In the report *Design thinking and the big society*, Blyth and Kimbell attempt to raise the power of design in the 'moulding of social problems' and 'making issues public'

rather than suggesting solutions (2011, p. 4). By designing artefacts, services, events, or even strategies, designers work on articulating matters of concern relating to issues. ‘Matters of concern’ include current conditions, such as factors, relations, perspectives, and conflicts, and also emerging and possible qualities and consequences. Rendering an issue with concrete forms or experiences constructs a public space for relevant people to make sense and debate the issue. In this approach, the aim of design is not to develop final products or services to meet daily needs or solve problems. Joachim Halse argues that design intervention is increasingly used as a research method to ‘enable new forms of experience, dialogue and awareness about the problematic to emerge’ (2016, p. 90). Carl DiSalvo states that the value of speculative intervention is to ‘manifest and articulate some of the factors and relations that constitute an issue’ (2016, p. 142). In the project, *Switch!*, exploring domestic energy use, researchers saw their design prototypes operated as an enquiry to ‘expose habits, norms, and standards, or to shift and renegotiate actors’ instead of ‘a resolution of the issue’ (Bergström, Mazé, Redström, & Vallgård, 2009, p. 3).

Designers use various strategies to construct publics in which issues are articulated. John Dewey’s treatment of ‘public’ is introduced into design research as his focus on the process of construction is relevant to design engagements. Dewey argues that publics are brought into being through and around issues, and people get together temporarily around issues (1927). A public does not exist by itself. It has to be constructed through the actions and efforts of communicating issues, which is where design can contribute (DiSalvo, 2009). From the cases illustrated above, we see the articulation is an active, innovative, and constructive process in which matters of concern around issues are made experientially accessible to people (Binder et al., 2011; Björgvinsson, et al., 2010; DiSalvo, 2009; Ehn, 2008). Here, I discuss three design strategies and sites that are used to construct publics. The first site is the ‘showroom’, mainly in Dunne and Raby’s programme of ‘Critical Design’;<sup>33</sup> the second is the ‘field’;<sup>34</sup>

emphasizing the use of prototypes in natural social settings; and the third is the ‘Participatory Design’ (PD) innovative process, which is theorized as designing ‘Things’.

The programme of Critical Design has been established and

<sup>33</sup> Other terms are also used: discursive design, speculative design, design fiction, interrogative design, and design-for-debate.

<sup>34</sup> The term ‘showroom’ is from the work of Ilpo Koskinen et al. (Koskinen, Binder, & Redström, 2008; Koskinen, Zimmerman, Binder, Redstrom, & Wensveen, 2011). ‘Showroom’ represents the programme of design research borrowing from art, and ‘field’ refers to the design research practices grounded in social science.

developed by Dunne and Raby in their educational programme in the Department of Interactive Design at the RCA since the mid-1990s. Its engagement with social issues is through challenging the values, orders, and beliefs of existing systems by combining critical social analysis and product and interaction design (Dunne & Raby, 2013, p. 35). It especially examines the role and speculative consequences of technologies in people's lives through designing technologic artefacts (Dunne & Raby, 2001). Just to take one of many examples, in the project, *I wanna deliver a shark*, the Japanese designer Ai Hasegawa (2012),<sup>35</sup> proposed a future scenario where female humans can deliver other species with the aid of advanced synthetic biology technology. This speculative design concept can articulate issues in various ways. It can be seen as a possible solution to the global problems of over-population and shortage of food. It asks, should humans still produce more babies in the current crisis? In addition, it can be seen as a favourable gesture from humans to help endangered species. It subverts anthropocentrism by suggesting using human bodies for the production of other than humans. Alternatively, can we see this technology as a resolution of food shortages, on the planet as humans could also produce food with their bodies? However, what would be the ethical debate on eating the 'baby' that a human gave birth to? Moreover, Ai Hasegawa stated that the concept was partially inspired by the annoying question, '*When will you have a baby*' that she frequently encountered when she turned 30. Implicitly put as a critique to the fact that women have limited procreation rights in many societies, the scenario 'I wanna deliver a shark' introduces a wider freedom with which an individual woman can decide to use her body. All in all, this concept becomes a stimulus of debates relating to various factors and perspectives of relevant issues.

The 'showroom' is strategically selected by Dunne and Raby as the site in which to articulate issues. In the curated exhibition, well-crafted product models, and exquisite photographs and videos of use scenarios are exhibited as vivid fragments of fictional scenarios. This is borrowed from the approach a museum uses to present art historical everyday artefacts to allow the audience to imagine what life was like in remote societies (Dunne & Raby, 2013, p. 94). With the same approach, they believe the comprehensive visual setting of the design fiction exhibited in the showroom can bring 'another yet-to-exist one' through artefacts, or 'props' in their words (pp. 43, 90). The audience is conceptualized as window-

<sup>35</sup> This project is referred to in the book, *Speculative everything* (Dunne & Raby, 2013, p. 65). A video of the project is available via this link: <https://vimeo.com/77692389>.

shoppers of the future who are skilful of imagining scenarios around the 'product' (2005, p. 100). DiSalvo appreciates this as a good way of using design skills to project the complexity of current states and future consequences of issues into concrete staged artefacts (2009). However, some researchers are critical of the white, clean, and splendid showroom or the type of audience, that is often still elite circles (Koskinen, 2012, p. 56; Tonkinwise, 2014). Politically engaged designers argue for a more penetrated public discourse as a preferred place for provocations and debates for designers to better practice their political responsibility and accountability (Fry, 2011; Keshavarz & Mazé, 2013).

The second site of 'field' refers to the design research practices, often in interaction design, which bring prototypes into daily social settings to study how users make sense of the technology. In a naturalistic setting, the artefact creates 'conditions under which people try to understand this technology, redefine it, develop a stance towards it, and change their behaviour and opinions of it in dealing with other people' (Kurvinen, Koskinen, & Battarbee, 2008, p. 49). Thus, the artefact becomes a social object, constructed with social meanings through use practices along with other courses of social conduct and events in the *in situ* situation. To take some examples of design prototypes in the project, *Static!* aimed to spark reflections on energy use in the domestic space (Backlund et al., 2007). *Energy curtain* was able to save sunlight in the daytime that could be used in the evening, and *Erratic radio* could function as a normal radio and yet would get detuned and lose the channel if other electric appliances were in use. The prototypes were brought into a family's home for up to six weeks. Users needed to negotiate ways of using them in their daily routines: for instance, whether to close the curtain to block the sunlight so that the lights were used in the evening; or whether to switch off other household appliances to listen to their favourite music radio channel. The two interactive artefacts concretized the abstract issue of domestic energy use. Moreover, the repeated and mundane everyday interactions and encounters with the artefact could serve as a basis for raising reflections on users' patterns, experiences, and opinions on energy use (Ibid.). Through such forms of 'reflective use' or 'reflection in use', matters of concern around daily energy use are unfolded for interpretation and debate (Mazé & Redström, 2009, p. 34).

The third site is the Participatory Design innovative process and environment. PD scholars argue that the participatory innovation process should be reviewed as a public space where different 'matters

of concern' are played out (e.g. Binder, et al., 2011; Björgvinsson, et al., 2010). They theorize such design practices as staging 'Things'. The word 'Thing' is from ancient Greek and Germanic societies, referring to public places and events where diverse voices were shared, and conflicts were negotiated and solved. They argue that instead of designing a thing (an object or a device), designers design 'Things' (socio-material assemblies), with a constellation of heterogeneous participants: designers, citizens, and stakeholders (Binder, et al., 2011, p. 1). I will take one design project, *Bluetooth bus* in *Malmö Living Labs*<sup>36</sup> as an example. In the project, design researchers identified a local hip hop group, RGRA, comprised of first and second generation immigrants. The initial finding was the group wanted to be more visible to other residents in public spaces and also media landscapes. Inspired by the findings, the designers had the idea to make their music available on some bus routes, where passengers could download it by connecting their mobile phones through Bluetooth. They contacted Do-Fi, an IT company that can provide Bluetooth technology and the local bus company. RGRA saw it as a great opportunity to distribute their music more widely and be more visible in the urban space; the bus company saw the potential to attract more passengers; and the IT company saw opportunities to develop new services. Moreover, the innovation process revealed some matters of concern relating to issues like the urban controversies between Swedish and immigrant youngsters, how urban space should be constructed to encourage the more active participation of citizens, especially immigrants, and how you act as a resourceful citizen in Malmö in the urban and media space. Immigrants and their neighbourhood are often considered invisible or even dangerous by other parts of the city. The researchers suggest we see the *Bluetooth bus* as more than a prototype for further product or service development (Björgvinsson, et al., 2010). Rather, it constructed a public space that allowed different matters of concern for various stakeholders to emerge and become visible. It drew relevant emerging, marginal, weak, or agonistic practices together and made them public. In this process, the designers acted to engage 'heterogeneous participants, legitimise those marginalised, and maintain network constellations' (p. 50).

In PD practices, agonism is specifically valued. Publics should be the arena where controversies are allowed to exist, and dilemmas are raised, rather

<sup>36</sup> *Malmö Living Labs* aimed to build a platform to facilitate social innovations and collaborative services in local communities in Malmö neighbourhoods, Sweden. It has existed since 2007. So far, about 50 design experiments have been conducted and 500 participants and over 25 organizations have been involved.

The project *Bluetooth bus* is one of the design experiments starting with collaboration with a local hip pop organization, RGRA, comprised of immigrants (Björgvinsson, et al., 2010; Björgvinsson, Ehn, & Hillgren, 2012; Emilson, et al., 2014).

than where people gather just because they look alike and feel good about each other. In an 'agonistic public space', only when different voices are empowered and shared will conflicts have the potential to transform into constructive discussions and new possibilities (Björgvinsson, et al., 2012).

### **6.3.2. Constructing the public through constructed services**

When critical designers construct the public in the 'showroom', and interactive design researchers investigate issues by bringing prototypes into the 'field' of everyday use, service designers can engage people with a constructed situation intervened into daily settings. The site of issue articulation in this design position is constructed service. It is mainly built on the strategic site of the 'field', where people directly interact with the service and reflect in 'use'. The constructed service in the intervention refers to a social situation, deliberately constructed with different social orders and rules from the normalities of the intervened-in social setting. The service should be deeply integrated into people's most routinized affairs, from milk deliveries to visa applications. When people encounter this intervention in their daily routines, they have to interpret the new situation, develop a stance, and form a set of new actions (or not) that they find appropriate or meaningful. The encounter consists of materials, a series of actions, social relations, rules of conduct, and experiences. Matters of concern are articulated through participants' situated and mundane practices and accounts relating to the service encounter. Service design provides a collective space for the articulation of issues through interaction-based and performative means.

I call the relevant people 'local members', who are the participants who directly and indirectly interact with the constructed service. The concept of 'local members' is borrowed from ethnomethodology. It refers to a particular social group who use common sense knowledge and practical skills to construct and maintain social orders and make them accountable and observable. The participants in Plant Hotel can be considered local members of their social world: the passer-by, the professor, or the elderly customer. In their daily routines, like walking along the street or visiting the elderly service centre as usual, they encounter Plant Hotel. They interpret the new situation, make sense of the new

objects, choose, assess, and take relevant established social norms into account, and finally form a set of interactions with the service (or not) (more in Section 2.2.3). The social actors negotiate a way of interpreting and acting which they find meaningful. Any of their actions is seen as the local member's account of making sense of the new possibility and of signifying the properties of themselves and their social world. Thus, even their rejection of interaction with or misunderstanding of Plant Hotel would be seen as accounts of themselves.

The anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn states that 'the most interesting claims people make are those they make about themselves'.<sup>37</sup> Here, in the ethnography of design interventions, the investigation looks into what people say about themselves when they encounter interventions. Moreover, interventions that play with the imaginative and emerging quality of social realities unfold two dimensions of the investigation in this particular mode of enquiry.

These are the speculative and reflective perspective, which I discuss in the next section.

<sup>37</sup> Clyde Kluckhohn made this statement on a course at Harvard University in 1960 (cited in Basso, 1996, p. 37).

## 6.4. Ethnography of Design Interventions

‘What do people say about themselves when they encounter interventions?’

developed from

*‘The most interesting claims people make are those they make about themselves.’*

- Clyde Kluckhohn (1960)

### 6.4.1. An enquiry into the possible: Implied from design anthropology

In Chapter 5, I showed how I constructed Plant Hotel and analysed the data that emerged from the field. Here, I introduce the theoretical background and some central concepts of this mode of enquiry with the merging of design interventions and ethnography. It is based on the theoretical framework of design anthropology.

Literally, the framework combines elements from the two disciplines of design and anthropology. However, it is not the practices where anthropologists do quick-and-dirty ethnographical work in order to provide insights for human-centred design or business management. It is not about anthropological studies of materiality and consumptions, either. Here, the central concept in this mode of enquiry that has inspired my work is ‘doing-anthropology-by-means-of-design’ instead of ‘doing-anthropology-by-means-of-ethnography’ (Gatt & Ingold, 2013, p. 150).

However, you might wonder whether the two disciplines have a distinctive attitude towards intervention (Anusas & Harkness, 2014; Gatt & Ingold, 2013; Hunt, 2011; Kjærsgaard & Boer, 2016). Intervention for anthropologists is politically and ethically fraught as a consequence of the discipline’s dark history with colonial regimes (Hunt, 2011, p. 36), whilst designers who are inherently interventionist hold a strong experimental and transformative position. Despite these distinctive attitudes, researchers have developed ‘a novel and exciting interface where the speculative imagination of possible futures meets the comparative study of human ways of living and knowing’ in the framework of design anthropology (Leach, 2011, cited in Tunstall, 2013, p. 239). Regarding the target, design anthropology looks into the imaginative, possible, and emergent quality of social reality,

compared with ‘anthropology-by-means-of-ethnography’ which usually focuses on the given present.

Then, how does design anthropology study the possible? As ‘anthropology-by-means-of-design’, it is through experimental engagement with the happening of the social. The experimental and speculative engagement can take various design forms: mock-ups, prototypes, workshops, exhibitions, and other design events. In concrete materials and bodily and material experiences *in situ*, the possible unfolds and becomes observable and accountable (Halse, 2013, p. 181). Then, participant’s concrete practices, behaviours, emotions, and experiences emerging from design interventions are studied with ethnographic sensitivity. Thus, the possible does not lie in the hypothetical world. It lies in an altered version of the ‘here-and-now’, which makes it possible for ethnography to look into people’s thoughts and aspirations regarding what is possible and emerging. Anthropology, with its roots and strength in cultural interpretation (Greetz, 1973), can provide theoretical sensitivity to the value orientations of various social groups and complex contexts. It can extend the temporal horizon of future-orientated design interventions backwards, which echoes the argument that the past is a vital part of future-making (Otto & Smith, 2013).

This mode of enquiry has been practised back as far as early times when ethnographers worked in the field for technologic development in Xerox Parc, although the social scientists did not call their practices ‘ethnography of design interventions’. They studied existing practices, experimented with prototypes, and studied the emerging practices (e.g. Whalen & Bobrow, 2011). Another, more recent, case, is a design intervention in an over two-year design research project that aimed to explore new waste handling practices since 2008 in Denmark (Halse, Brandt, Clark, & Binder, 2010). This was positioned in a Participatory Design framework in which citizens and professional stakeholders were engaged in designing and visioning new possibilities. In one of the projects, a cardboard- mock-up of a battery-handling machine was made and placed in the real context of a local shop. During regular opening hours, the plant owner introduced the ‘machine’ to customers, and customers and staff interacted with the ‘machine’ and discussed possible practices around battery handling. The concrete characters of the possible became accountable through the mundane and situated dialogues and practices emerging from the mock-up.

## 6.4.2. Speculative and reflective dimensions

The speculative and reflective dimensions indicate that this new position I propose is committed to the exploration of both emerging and current characteristics of social relations. The construction of design interventions provides a provocative dialogue for people to critically and actively negotiate with new possibilities in their social lives, and also reflect on existing ones and challenge the status quo. Furthermore, it provides the analytical means to look into the data drawing on the construction and field of design interventions. As presented in Chapters 4 and 5, I studied local members' concrete practices, experiences, emotions, and accounts around the constructed service of Plant Hotel. In each setting, I analysed the ways in which the meanings of a guest plant and Plant Hotel were created by designers, organizers, plant owners, caregivers, and other participants.

On the one hand, I explored new credible and meaningful practices around the new mode of social relations. Such an enquiry investigates unsettled and unstable possibilities; for instance, the possibility of an elderly customer watering other people's plants while visiting a service centre. The study shed light on how participants' everyday routines might play out differently in a way that creates meaningful values. In addition, it worked to unfurl space for people to debate around the new mode of social relations and larger issues it might refer to. For instance, by interacting with Plant Hotel in the elderly service centre, several debates could be sparked, for example how the centre could involve the elderly customers in a more active way or reposition them as customers, or how other citizens could interact with the elderly in a new and meaningful way.

On the other hand, the focus is given to the present, with the aim to reveal, construct, reflect, and shake existing social relations. Just as critical designers Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby famously claim, design can 'unsettle the present' rather than 'predict the future' (2013, p. 88). The new mode of social relations, apart from exploring the possible, can serve as a mirror through which the present is re-examined and reflected. Distance from the present is created through design strategies of defamiliarization and estrangement so that the new possibility appears 'strangely familiar' (Blauvelt, 2003) and 'closer to everyday life' (Dunne & Raby, 2001, p. 58). The new service appears slightly strange or unfamiliar due to the new rules that might require local members to develop a new definition of the constructed situation and form new patterns of action. However, it still appears

familiar enough that it is firmly integrated with routinized daily settings, like how Plant Hotel opened in a café in the service centre that participants visit frequently. The new possibility cannot appear too strange so that local members fail to make sense of or form actions towards the intervention. In the analysis of the field data for Plant Hotel, I have analysed how the constructed service revealed and challenged the norms of the social setting or sparked critical reflections among local members who saw themselves afresh.

### **6.4.3. The dual ontological status: Affirmation and negation**

The ethnography of design interventions serves as a speculative and critical enquiry of social relations. It is concerned with both the new and the present. I would like to add a specific debate from the field of participatory art. The answer of the dual ontological status of artwork that ‘affirms an alternative’ and ‘negates the status quo’ well frames the two dimensions of the enquiry of the ethnography of the possible. The debate attempts to answer a specific A-or-B question: in which way should art approach social relations, an ameliorative one to propose the new or a disruptive way to reveal the reality?

In art practices that are engaged with social relations, the ameliorative approach often aims for social inclusion and community-building at a local and site-specific level. Artists go into communities and neighbourhoods to improve local people’s lives, from providing down-to-earth daily services, like massages and house renovation, to organizing workshops and events. These art practices are usually based on ideas of gift-giving, generosity, and mutual help, to create consensus among participants and enhance social solidarity and inclusion (Grennan, 2014). However, the cultural theorist Paola Merli (2002) asks critically: can art practices really enhance social cohesion; how much impact do they have; what is the quality of the cohesion? He observes that art projects relating to community-building and social cohesion are often benevolent. Examples are singing with unemployed youth or weaving fabrics with immigrant women. They succeed in generating positive social experiences and a harmonious atmosphere during the constructed situation. Nevertheless, under the surface of the peaceful consensus, the participants’ fundamental condition of existence remains untouched or unchanged and no awareness or critical reflection is

raised. Moreover, it easily lapses into well-intended homilies or moral exemplars.

If you aim for improvement or positive change, Merli argues you should also focus on the deep structures of social and political systems that have actually caused the problem or exclusion (2002). The benevolent attitude does not help. This argument is shared by Claire Bishop. Instead of celebrating the micro-utopian realization of proximity, she calls for more enquiries into analysing and representing what is 'structurally excluded from society' (2012, p. 28). She insists it is more important for art to make interesting and alarming statements than useful and modest gestures (p. 23). In her writing, she is proud of the artist Santiago Sierra's work, *8 People paid to be in cardboard boxes*,<sup>38</sup> which is a good example of disturbing sound from art (p. 222). Sierra paid eight low-paid workers nine dollars per person per hour to sit inside cardboard boxes for four hours per day during the exhibition. At first sight, visitors were only confronted with eight huge boxes in the gallery space. Then they would find there were people concealed in the prison-like boxes (Figures 38, 39). By creating a situation where the eight people remained silent and invisible, the social status of the invisibility of low-paid workers was exaggerated in the art representation. Responding to the despairing social condition of low-paid workers, Sierra did not adopt the ameliorative approach of improving their social lives or well-being. Nor did he seek to promote particular clear values. His work was a classic avant-garde prescription of provocation and disruption.

This debate appears to imply a dilemma over whether artists should produce the logics of social inclusion or reveal the confrontation lying in reality. Nevertheless, the real point is beyond the binary division between affirmation (of the new possibility of social inclusion) and negation (of exclusion in the present). David Bell (2017) argues that any good socially engaged art has a dual ontological status, which can 'affirm an alternative' and, meanwhile, 'negate the status quo' (p. 9). It should 'enlarge our capacity to imagine the world and our relations anew' (Bishop, 2012, p. 284) and, on the other hand, communicate 'the paradoxes that are repressed in everyday discourse'. Therefore, the central target of Merli and Bishop's critiques is not the ameliorative approach itself, but the non-criticality and superficiality of the utopian realization. Pablo Helguera holds a strong argument that no matter which approach is used, the key is to have 'a critically

<sup>38</sup> This project was firstly done in Guatemala City in 1998. After that, he used the same strategy in other countries like German. The project in Figure 39 is part of Santiago Sierra's exhibition curated in a German art centre Deichtorhallen Hamburg in 2013.



Figure 38: The project, *8 people paid to be in cardboard boxes*, by Santiago Sierra



Figure 39: Visitors were looking inside the boxes.

self-reflective dialogue' (2011, n.p.). If a well-intended action does not create a critically reflective framework, it is social work but not artwork. Thus, the ameliorative approach in art also demands self-reflexivity and criticality.

The insistence on radical gestures, like locking people in prison-like boxes, and the critiques of the ethical turn in artwork are related to the legitimate agenda and historical burden of art. However, design is different. Design does not cry for autonomy or freedom. Famously defined as practices aiming to improve the present into preferred situations (Simon, 1996, p. 111), design inherently has an ameliorative relationship with society. Born to serve industry, design is not often ashamed to work for corporative benefits. The emerging practices of designing for government, especially in Northern Europe and the UK, are never self-reflected as 'a government poodle'. Thus, design does not need to learn to produce another disruptive sound where confrontation is doubled. However, the valid point in this debate from art that design can learn from is the argument for the necessity of more enquiries into the deep structures that have actually caused the problem. It supports the speculative and reflective dimensions of the constructive mode of ethnography of design interventions. Moreover, like Bishop, designers also recognize the significance of revealing contradictions and challenging the status quo (e.g. Dunne, 2005). This also echoes the argument in Participatory Design on the importance of constructing 'agonistic publics' (e.g. Björgvinsson, et al., 2012).



# Chapter 7

Conclusion

This doctoral work has investigated the type of services where people work with and for each other, bypassing institutional and monetary mechanisms. These can be called services of conviviality and collaboration. It has indicated two essential characteristics of this type of service. The first one, regarding the role and agency of participants, is that people act as capable and active agents to contribute rather than as served customers. The second one, looking at the relational aspect, is that participants in the service are not connected or organized through institutional or monetary structures.

There is much design space around the service of conviviality and collaboration. For instance, Manzini's manifesto proposes designers can contribute to scaling-up and amplifying this mode to make a larger impact (Section 1.2). This approach of growing weak 'seeds' inspired my work in the beginning and was taken as the hypothesis when I was approaching *Paja*. Drawing on a close study of the service organized by the subcultural group, the findings have revealed the resistant relation between the ideologically driven 'seeds' and the mainstream, which is constructed in the negative identity formation of the 'seeds'. The study, therefore, provides a critical perspective on the ameliorative approach, as well as the system-thinking logics of vertical integration and horizontal scaling-up. As a response to the design attempt of growing 'seeds' to catalyse a larger societal change, I call for the importance of full awareness of the characteristics of the boundary between 'seeds' and the mainstream if designers attempt to shake the boundary. Another significant design space is to explore strategic frameworks by integrating collaborative services into other modes of public or business services to achieve better individual and societal well-being, similar to the model of public-private-people-partnerships (P4).<sup>39</sup>

Rather than taking the directions mentioned above, this doctoral work located the focus on the design possibilities within this mode of service itself and among the people who participate. I propose that the design of this type of service can be used as

a means to identify, support, and build individuals' capabilities, and to discover and create meaningful social relations in services outside the contract-based context.

<sup>39</sup> Researchers have been discussing the possible application of the P4 model in various fields like waste management, health care, and residential development (e.g. Ahmed & Ali, 2006; Kuronen, Junnila, Majamaa, & Niiranen, 2010; Ng, Wong, & Wong, 2013).

## 7.1. Design as an Agent of Capability Building

In our modern times, people's daily needs and affairs are largely arranged by goods and services provided through institutional and market mechanisms. There is little space left for people's capabilities to do things by themselves. How can we create opportunities where individuals are constructed as capable agents? This is a broad enquiry with the investigations from various fields, such as development studies, pedagogy, interaction design, and science and technology studies. This doctoral work approaches the enquiry on conviviality from the position of service design, and the context is limited to Nordic societies. The self-repair bicycle workshop is constructed as a platform that gathers people who can contribute to each other regarding bicycle repair and building. It integrates the resources of bicycle enthusiasts who offer volunteering help, those who have spare materials and tools to donate, and those who are able to or want to learn to repair their bicycles and help others. Therefore, service design can provide constructive implications for identifying, integrating, and making use of people's capabilities, and also supporting and growing their capabilities.

The study of *Paja* contributes to the enquiry on conviviality through deconstructing and detailing the abstract concept of 'conviviality' into the most concrete and mundane materials, practices, and experiences. The study argues that only by examining closely how a service of conviviality is actually organized are we able to further design for it. Moreover, the study of *Paja* provides a fresh lens for re-examining critically some taken-for-granted assumptions in service design regarding the agency of users or customers. This work has less interest in criticizing the framework of user-centred design, although the critical distance has been investigated. More precisely, by revealing the critical distance, the intent is to raise awareness among designers who aim to design for change, especially a radical change in everyday practices and lifestyle. When designers aim for a new possibility of a less commercial and more sustainable society, it is important to look around in everyday life, re-examine some taken-for-granted concepts, and reflect how they are constructed. Moreover, it calls for the awareness of the necessity of seriously digging into what values the established design assumptions articulate and what agency of users they hypothesize.

This thesis also provides wider implications to any person or institution who sees significant value when individuals gain more autonomy, power, and responsibility in their field. Due to the specific characteristics of the mode of collaborative services, including the values of conviviality and yet the disadvantages of efficiency, stability, and certainty, this mode has more significant values in some fields and less in others. In each situation when designing goods or services to assist people in meeting their daily needs, designers should consider when and how to support the easy and efficient completion of tasks, and when and how to leave people adequate space for long-term learning and capability building, just like the decision the volunteer needs to make in *Paja*: *'He is struggling with the repair, should I tell him what to do or not? And how?'*

## 7.2. Can Mundane Daily Collaborations Amongst Individuals Challenge Societal Institutions?

When designing for a service where the relations among participants are not based on contract-related structures, designers have to look for other means to connect people to serve their needs. What meaningful social relations can be generated outside the contract-related context? How can design contribute to this enquiry? This doctoral work has delineated a methodical position in Chapter 6. To summarize, the position takes the enquiry of the ethnography of design interventions, in which the possible is made experientially accessible in real social contexts, studied with ethnographic attention, and reflected and investigated by local members (Halse, 2013, p194). Within this mode, the new social relations that are being designed for go beyond the utilitarian purpose of the service. Rather, the service stands as a statement or a probe to articulate, construct, and challenge social relations.

Here, I have several points to clarify, reinforce, and take further. Firstly, when I claim the design of collaborative services is to create new social relations and challenge social boundaries, the statement or aim might sound too broad and lack a boundary or focus, as the term 'social relations' can refer to everything. However, the proposed position takes a site-specific and locality-based approach in that the constructive investigation takes place in



a specific social setting where specific social relations emerge. For instance, the investigations in an elderly service centre and the cross-border site of North and South Korea are different. This means in this position, enquiry will not be made without thorough and situated understandings of the context, the people, and their social relations. This position takes a bottom-up stance that leaves little space for generalization or superficial local knowledge of the site.

The second point to reinforce is that the constructed service and the intervened-in social setting or institution influence each other in both directions. On the one hand, the intervention proposes new service rules that challenge the normalities of the context, and, on the other hand, the intervention is strictly constrained and also enabled by the existing structure and practices of the setting. Take the Plant Hotel at the border as an example. Borders often act as barriers, aiming to separate 'us' from 'them' and install and control the movement and exchange of things, people, and ideas between two places (Green, 2012, pp. 576-577). Contrarily, the constructed service encourages individuals to work for and with each other. By encouraging exchange and dialogue among visitors from the two sides, the service aims to shake and subvert the norms and meanings of the cross-border site that is supposed to maintain the separation of the two nations. However, at the same time, the service is strictly constrained by the political rules, practices, and environment of Panmunjom. For security reasons, only a limited selection of plants is allowed to be checked in, and plants have to undergo phytosanitary tests for 48 hours before going into the meeting room. Moreover, the strict, complicated, and even weird process of application and entering the site is in line with USFK (United States Forces Korea) Regulations (the dress code is not a joke).

Here is the last point I would like to take further. This position shows ambition and courage to use the most mundane daily collaboration among individuals as a means to challenge large societal and political institutions. For instance, helping to water and adopt plants is related to the most mundane and modest daily needs and collaborative practices. However, when it is integrated with the cross-border environment of North and South Korea, one of the most disputed and complex politically constructed boundaries with several superpowers involved, it becomes the means to challenge the political border discourse. Therefore, it sets forth the belief in the discursive power and potential that collaborative services can hold. Daily needs can be as simple as watering plants, drinking

milk, or celebrating a child's birthday, and a collaborative act can be help watering another's plants, delivering milk, or putting up decorative balloons. Can design, by making use of these daily needs and collaboration among individuals, shake societal institutions, such as the border, state, or church? Can design, by engaging individuals to work for and with each other towards daily affairs, shake the politically, socially, or economically constructed boundaries that are meant to divide (Figure 40)?

### 7.3. A Reflective Approach: Creating Critical Distance from the 'Here-and-now'

In this conclusion, I would like to outline a reflective perspective, contributing to design practices that are increasingly engaged with complex social issues and problems. The approach proposes a reflective perspective with the engagement with the possible.

This doctoral work has argued that the study of *Paja* serves a mirror for reflecting and re-examining the ethos of commercial services, and the ethnography of Plant Hotel also has the reflective dimension of challenging the status quo. Here, I attempt to outline an orientation that both modes of enquiry share. The subjects of the two modes of enquiry are both located in the worlds of alternatives, a world in the marginal outside mainstream business logic and a world in design interventions constructed with new rules. Attentive to the other possible, both methods create critical distance from the 'here-and-now'. This means that the study of the 'other-and-there', the 'field' of the bicycle workshop and the 'field' of Plant Hotel, is able to re-examine the 'here-and-now' in a critical way.

The two disciplines of design and anthropology seem to have opposite orientations (Anusas & Harkness, 2014; Gatt & Ingold, 2013; Hunt, 2011; Kjærsgaard & Boer, 2016). Design is a future-orientated practice that constantly proposes new forms of objects, practices, and lives, while anthropology is fundamentally retrospective, living lives in ethnography that experience, interpret, and represent practices

and customs that have already taken place.<sup>40</sup> However, some researchers actually propose that both hold the same orientation, which is

<sup>40</sup> In anthropology, many researchers have proposed that contemporary anthropology should be more involved with change and imagination instead of mere representation of social reality (e.g. Crapanzano, 2004; Ingold, 2013; Rabinow, Marcus, Faubion, & Rees, 2008; Sneath, Holbraad, & Pedersen, 2009)

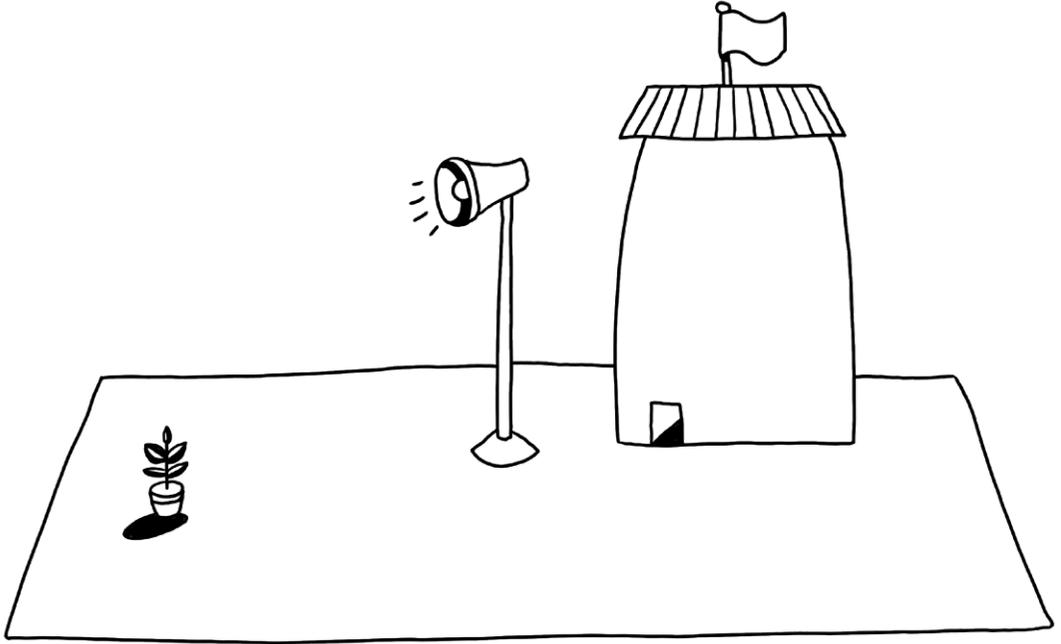


Figure 40: The 'plant' and the 'border'

'a concern with that other which is possible' (Anusas & Harkness, 2014). That 'other' refers to, more specifically, the alternative and possible others. Anthropologists interpret and share 'how things are different' in other societies, while designers explore 'how things can be different' in the future. In anthropology, 'the other' is the stories of other people's lives revealed in ethnographical interpretations, for instance, alternatives to contemporary cultures. As a discipline defined as comparative cultural studies, it has a huge sensitivity to differences and particulars (Eriksen, 2001), and it has been involved in presenting the diversity of possibilities in humankind. In design, 'the other' emerges from the designerly shaping of the future, which can be a new form of artefact, a new use of technology, a new way of constructing a system, or a platform to evoke new practices and social relations. Design, with its imaginative and speculative engagement with the world, constantly explores spaces of possibilities. For both anthropology and design, the subject of enquiry is about an unfamiliar, distant, and alternative world (Anusas & Harkness, 2014). The 'not-here-or-now' world can be real or imaginary, presenting distance in space (in ethnography) or in time (in design).

Both being attentive to the same orientation of the other possible, they also share one aim. As the critical designers Dunne

and Raby in 2001 and the anthropologists Marcus and Fischer in 1986 both put their work in the same way, it is to explore its position of investigating between the present and the other possible. In this doctoral work, the enquiries into the bicycle workshop and Plant Hotel have both investigated the critical distance between services of conviviality and collaboration and services serving a commercial aim. The findings from the study of *Paja* provided a fresh eye to render the taken-for-granted understandings and assumptions of services and service design as exotic. In the study of Plant Hotel, while I looked at new practices emerging from the intervention, I was also committed to the investigation of matters of concern surrounding the 'present'.

Based on the analytical stance of creating critical distance from the 'here-and-now' by studying the other possible, this thesis intends to outline a reflective approach to future-orientated design practices, especially when they are engaged with social issues and problems. It focuses on reflecting on, especially critically, the present (the 'here-and-now') in the space of the new, and the challenge the present faces in the new. This perspective is equally important as attempts with a speculative and transformative focus, as the past is the solid construction of the future. When design is increasingly engaged with complicated and large social issues and problems, there is a need for more enquiries into the deep structures that have actually caused the problem or constructed the issue. However, the enquiry into understanding complex and broad systems seems to be the primary job of social scientists, and designers are ill-equipped to deal with this (Armstrong, et al., 2014; Chen, et al., 2016). Still, there is space for design. Apart from established programmes like Critical Design, the present can be revealed, constructed, and reflected in the constructive practices of new possibilities. Thus, the new possibility is not necessarily a future we want to reach. It can serve as a lens of otherness with which to de-familiarize and construct the present. This approach echoes the argument from art that a good piece of constructive work should have the dual ontological statuses of 'affirms an alternative' and 'negates the status quo'.

To conclude, the constructive work of a new possibility can be committed to attentiveness to the present, or more precisely, critical distance from the present. In design, to know the present better is an enquiry comprised of values and outcomes in itself. In addition, in serving the transforming purpose, the insight of critical distance from the present helps to gain better understandings of the new possible and how to get there.



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## Lists of Figures

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*'This is design research at its best, testing and pushing the boundaries: working on topics like service, relevant to design; always doing good research, and always from an unusual angle. This is one of the best design research pieces I've seen in recent years. You are an amazingly talented design researcher, certainly one of the best I have ever seen. Congrats!'*

**-Ilpo Koskinen, Professor from Hong Kong Polytechnic University**

*'The most compelling strength of the thesis is that it brings new methods and ideas into the service design framework, [...] that is speculative and critical thinking with non-instrumental ambitions. The candidate's melding together of relational aesthetics and service design reorients service design practice toward a more critical, open ended and richly ambiguous set of social relations. It is especially important to contemporary debates in the field.*

*She has managed to weave together many different strands- service design, social innovation, bricolage, relational aesthetics, speculative design-into one seamless fabric, which is hardly an easy or effortless task.'*

**-Jamer Hunt, Associate professor from Parsons, New York**

*'The dissertation demonstrates independent and critical thinking. It proposes new directions for service design towards conviviality and social relations. Activating non-utilitarian, critical and exploratory approaches is a timely and welcome contribution to service design.'*

**-Joachim Halse, Associate professor from The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen**



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