

# a provocation



Developing participation in  
social design: suspending  
the social?

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Image: Helena Almeida, *Inhabited Painting*, 1975.

# Design as a social research methodology?

## Outline of a 'provocation'

Context – recent changes in methods-scape.

Examples.

Inventive methods - response to the changing methods-scape.

Probe and prototype

Products or projects?

Inside or outside: inside and outside?

Open or shut: open and shut

Designing lines of inquiry.



# Knowledge infrastructures and method ecologies

- Opening up of social research to different kinds of participation by individuals, social groups, business and the state; calls to demonstrate impact and show relevance; collaboration and participation; experiments 'in the wild'; A/B testing.
- Decline of universalizing theories and grand narratives; claim that analysis of big data does not require theory; divination.
- 'Research methods' have (some) intellectual and institutional 'autonomy' – eg research councils invest in training, but also '*methods creep*' (Marres 2012) – methods built into devices – from statistical packages and tape recorders to apps, social media and big data.
- Role of metrics – ongoing, recursive, sometimes automated; market in bespoke 'actionable' metrics.
- Operationalisation of the speed of feedback of loops between representation and intervention – 'real time'; research grant sprints.
- Anticipation; pre-emption.



## Example: From national statistics to big data?

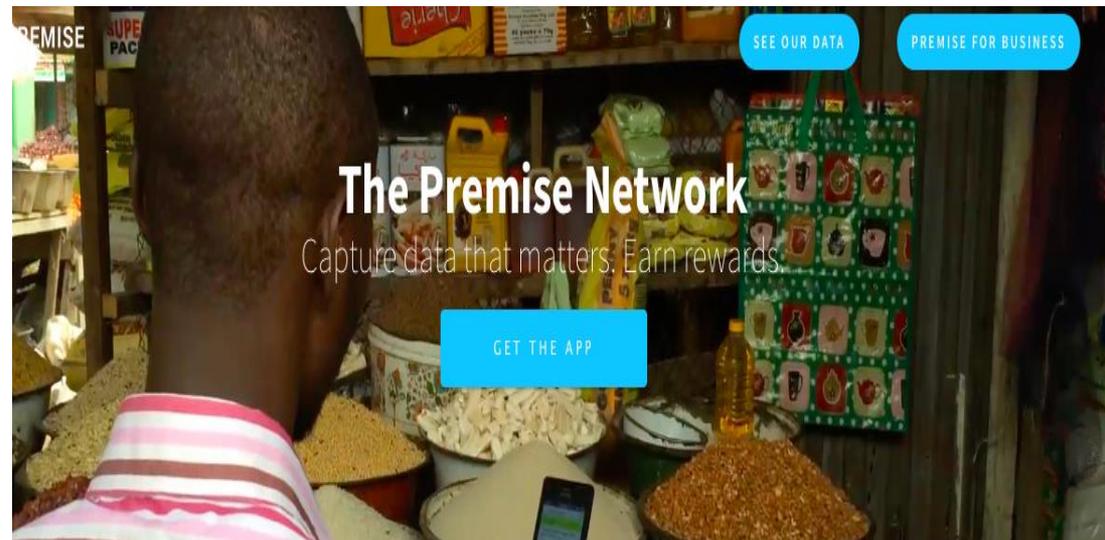
- Argentine controversy about legitimacy of CPI – The Billion Prices Project, Premise (Gross and Lury 2014);
- Census – European review - use of commercial data-sets along with administrative data-sets; post-demography?
- Bio-banks – the Quantified Self Movement:

With buzz around Apple’s forthcoming iWatch, FitBit’s Force and the continued success of Nike’s fuel band, the celebration of “quantified self” technology is on the rise. Mobile apps, wearable tech and other products that connect users with their health is a clear sign that consumers want to play an active role in their own wellness. If leveraged correctly, the quantified self-movement could provide valuable patient insights as well as reduce long-term costs for healthcare brands.

But before talking about the benefits to brands, we must first understand their importance to the consumer. After all, it’s the customer (or in this case, patient), that should always come first. These products don’t just monitor activity or measure how long you’re at the gym. **They allow users to connect their actions with the effect of those actions.** Quantified self products engage the wearer with their lifestyle goals, stress levels and current healthcare regimens. ....

To get a better sense of this **feedback loop** between measurement and behavior change lets look at a few examples of quantified self products. ....

[Lift](#) is the generalist of quantified self applications. It focuses on a simple cornerstone of wellness: Building habits. Users choose simple goals – call parents, read emails, go to the gym – and confirm each time they make progress towards that goal. Their progress then populates an attractive graph and is simultaneously shared with their network. Lift uses beautiful visual reinforcement, social support and iterative progress to enable constructive habit building. The feedback loop goes beyond physical health to make overall behavior change fun and engaging.



## Example: Commercial bespoke, 'actionable' measures

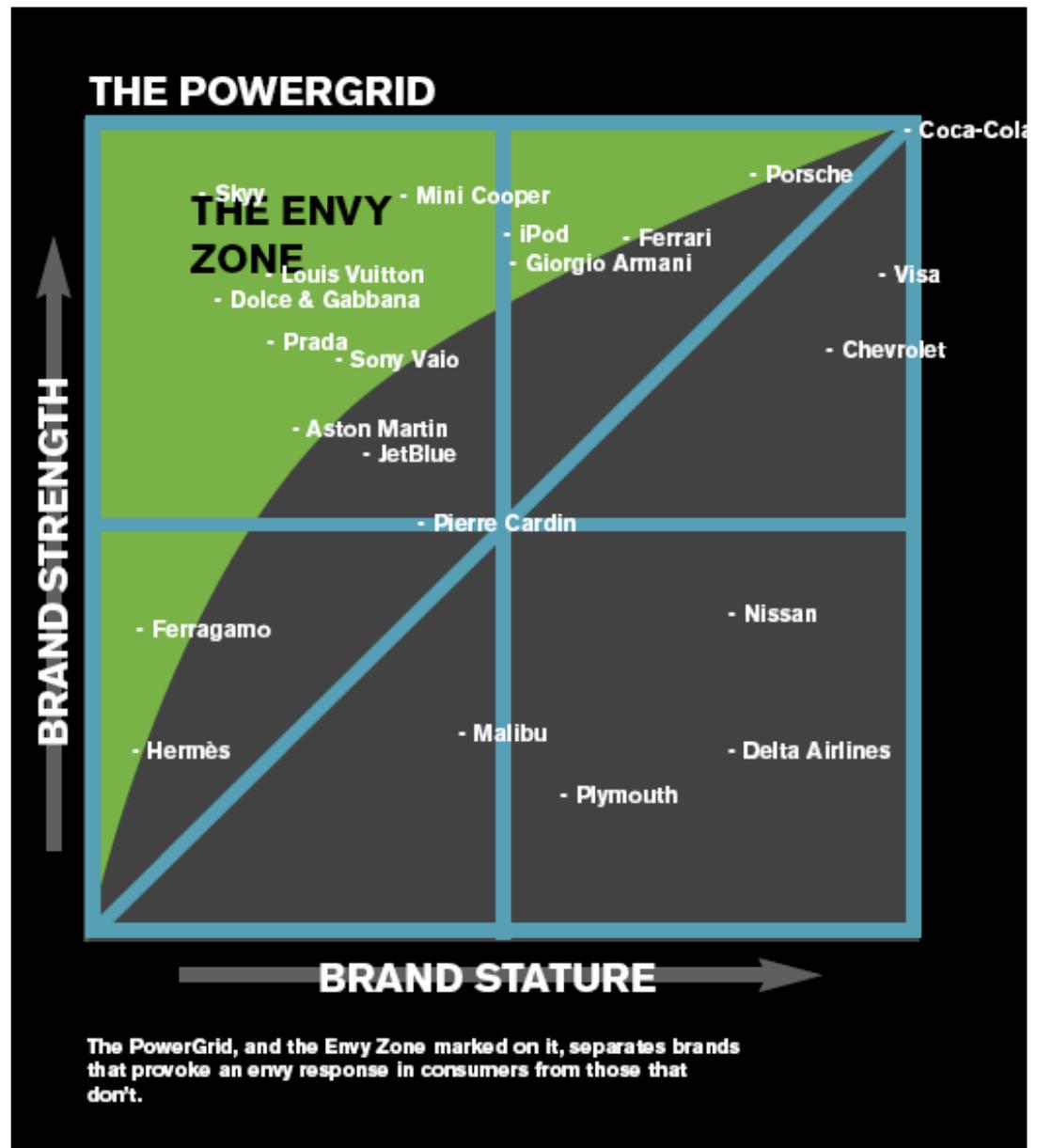
Brand valuation techniques (Moor and Lury 2011): eg

- 'The Power Grid': envy matrix;
- Propensity to Recommend;
- Triple Value Accounting – economic, social and environmental values.

'Lean start-up methodology': agility?

'A core component of Lean Startup methodology is **the build-measure-learn feedback loop**. The first step is figuring out the problem that needs to be solved and then developing a minimum viable product (MVP) to begin the process of learning as quickly as possible. Once the MVP is established, a startup can work on tuning the engine. This will involve measurement and learning and must **include actionable metrics that can demonstrate cause and effect question.**'

(<http://theleanstartup.com/principles>)



## Example: Participative measures: Klout

‘For centuries, influence had been in the hands of a few. Social media has allowed anyone to drive action to those around them, democratizing influence. Klout measures this influence across several social networks and shows users how they impact the people connected to them.’ (Klout 2012)

Metrics that invite, direct and exploit reactivity.

Two-faced? To user and to third parties – eg customer service agencies (Gerlitz and Lury).



A screenshot of the Klout profile for 'Continuum Philosophy'. The profile includes a bio: 'Think Philosophy. Our friendly marketer brings you food for (philosophical!) thought in the form of news &amp; exclusives. A Bloomsbury company. London'. It shows 'Influences 113 others' with a row of profile pictures and 'Influential about 11 topics' including 'Small Business', 'Philosophy', and 'Social Sciences'. A yellow callout box says 'Invite to Klout, and increase your verified connections!'. There are also social media icons for Twitter and Facebook.

A vertical navigation menu for the 'Score Analysis' section. The menu items are: 'COMPARISON', 'SCORE ANALYSIS' (highlighted in orange), 'TOPICS', 'INFLUENCERS', 'LISTS', 'KLOUT STYLE', 'PERKS', and 'ACHIEVEMENTS'.



A section titled '90-day Activity' showing data for three social media platforms. For Twitter, it lists: Retweets (187), Mentions (54), Followers (5.1K), and Following (182). For Facebook and Google+, it states: 'This person has not yet registered for Klout.' and includes an 'INVITE TO KLOUT' button for each.

# The politics (and policing) of methods

Law (2004):

If 'research methods' are allowed to claim methodological hegemony or (even worse) monopoly, and I think that there are locations where they try to do this, then when we are put into relation with such methods we are being placed, however rebelliously, in a set of constraining normative blinkers. We are being told how we must see and what we must do.

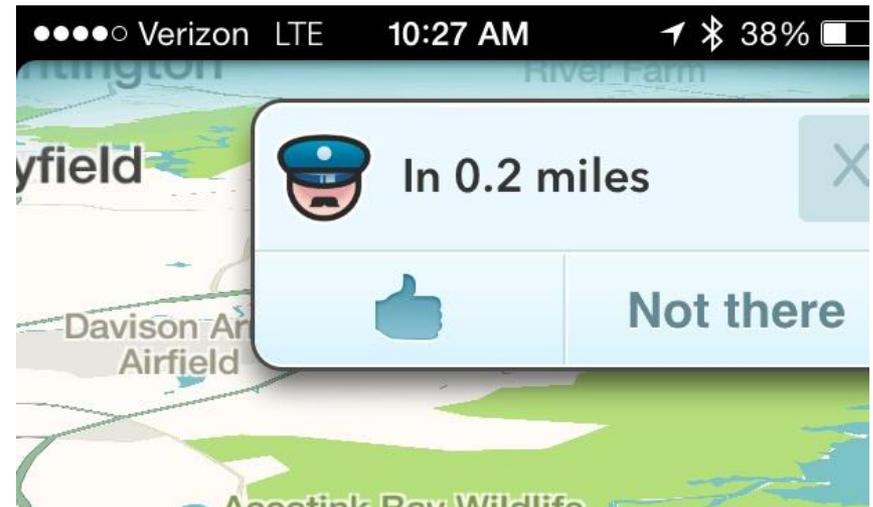
Flusser (2014):

... when methods infiltrate being and obligation, and technology infiltrates science and politics, the absurd eats its way in. Method for method's sake, technology as a goal in itself, and '*l'art pour l'art*', that is, function as the function of a function – that is the posthistorical life'

Marres and Gerlitz (2014) identifies 3 positions:

1. Equate sociological and social methods – see the latter as the naturalization/appropriation of social science methodology.
2. Oppose sociological and social methods – eg commercial methods of brand valuation lack rigour.
3. Refuse fixed identity/difference between them; method as unstable and undetermined; recognise that methods are interested - method as a way of equipping an object, a problem; view methods as sites of engagement – method development as a way of engaging critically and creatively with wider analytical apparatuses; methodological uncanny.

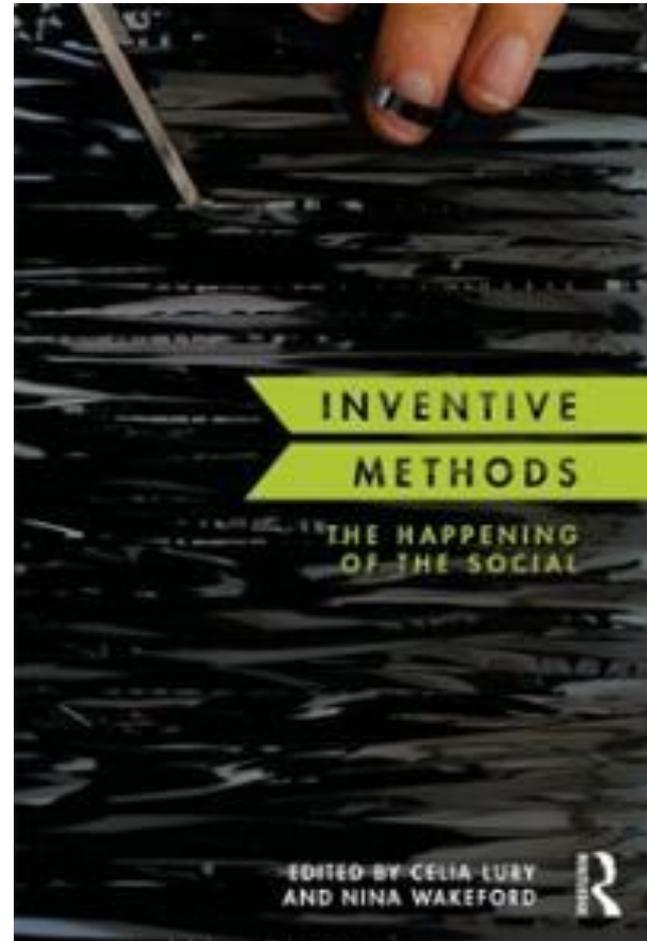
Interface methods: science and society



# Inventive methods: the happening of the social

(Lury and Wakeford, eds, Routledge, 2012)

- Dynamic – non-linear - ontology: the *happening* of the social.
- Entries on: configuration (Suchman), set (Mackenzie), phrase (Fuller and Gurionova), probe (Boehner, Gaver and Boucher) and many others, starting with anecdote (Michael) and going through to tape recorder (Back); organised as an alphabetical list – incomplete, inviting further contributions, and requiring further thought.
- ‘... jumpy materializations of practices, transforming and dissimilar agencies rather than elegantly inert guarantors of epistemological simplicity’ (Katie King).



## Probes: 'packets of provocative items'

'Probes are a method for developing a richly textured but fragmented understanding of a setting or situation. Developed in a design context, their purpose is not to capture what is so much as to inspire what might be. *Because their motivations come from design*, Probes embody a different set of sensibilities from most other social research methods. Most fundamentally, *they make a virtue of uncertainty and risk*, acknowledging and celebrating the idiosyncratic interpretations of designers and participants. They aim to open up possibilities, *rather than converging towards singular truths*, and can be conceived as part of a *conversation* among designers and the people and places *for which they design*.' (Boehner, Gaver and Boucher, in Lury and Wakeford 2012)

From probes to prototypes?

The Interaction Research Studio explores the design of computational systems for everyday life. Our practice-based research integrates design-led research methods with work on embedded and ubiquitous technologies to produce prototype products embodying the concepts of interaction. *We don't pursue design as problem solving*, but instead design products to create situations that encourage playfulness, exploration and insight. (<http://www.gold.ac.uk/interaction/>)

Problems or possibilities?

Are problems bad and possibilities good? (all of them?)

Do we want to shut down problems and open up possibilities? (all of them?)



## Prototypes

The prototype ... is a 'trap' for a contemporary figure of possibility and expectation. The work of such a trap is **to keep sociality in suspension**. The perception of suspension is elicited itself by 'the prototype' as a material but also as a social form. Sometimes it is sociality that drives the 'proto' with respect to the material 'type'; sometimes it is the artefactual that '**speeds up**' against an apparently still and dormant background of social expectations. Prototyping is what a perception of **liberated and self-released social relationships** may do to and through the material world; it is also what a conception of **a material world 'in beta'** does to social relationships. The artefact is prefigured in prototyping as social process; the object as transitive materiality is elicited by a conception of social relationships as transiently experimental. (Jiménez 2014)

On what basis should we trust to 'conversations' between designers and 'the people and places for which they design'?

What does it mean to say that the prototype is a social form? especially if it involves suspending sociality. Do you like being suspended? Left hanging?

My argument here, then, is that prototyping works as a cultural heuristic, in ways not unlike how (say) 'comparison' or 'compatibility' have at different points in time provided aesthetic and critical purchase to the function of social analysis. Prototyping is its own form of analysis, one, moreover, that places **analysis itself 'in beta'**. In this sense, prototyping works to produce scenarios not so much of comparison or compatibility as of compossibility. Whereas comparison presumes scale, and comparability requires partiality, compossibility supplements these by operating within and promoting a field of suspension, one that facilitates a proliferation of abductions and transformations, including the possibility of (virtuous) failure. Herein lies, again, the 'trap' of the prototype: **failure (recursively) prototyped**. (Jiménez 2014)

The problem (and sometimes hidden politics) of possibility. Self-release?

"Fail beta/better": both material world and analysis in beta - a solution to the problem of solutionism (or not)?

Compossibility – composing multiple possibilities? Infiniton.

# Products and contexts

Foucault's notion of dispositif or apparatus:

'... a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is **the system of relations** that can be established between these elements.'

(Foucault, 1980)

Agamben (2009) expands on this:

'Further expanding the already large class of Foucauldian apparatuses, I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings.'

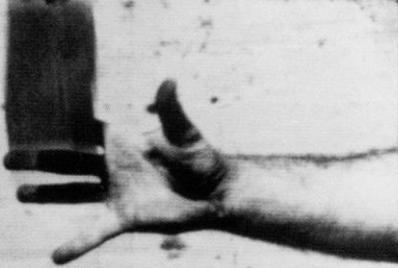
Participate – you may? You must?

Can an object suspend the social?





From knowledge sites to knowledge processes.



Design thinking (Kimbell 2011 and 2012) – giving form; problem solving; from a process of forms to forms of process.

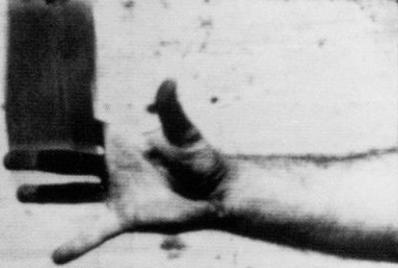


Richard Serra: *Hand catching lead*, 1968, also known as *Design Methodology: Clutching at straws*, 2015

<http://vodpod.com/watch/1504680-richard-serra-hand-catching-lead-1968>



Starting and stopping; episodic; analysis in beta: recursive failure; never stopping?



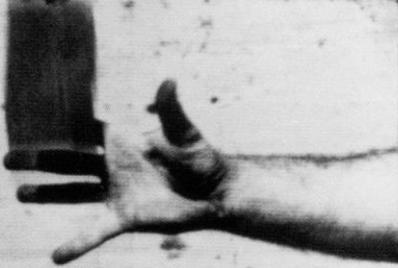
Inside or outside?

The 'experimental' apparatus is not only hand and lead, or even hand and lead and unseen person/machine dropping lead; it is also the camera, and us, the viewers (*Hand catching lead*, now on Youtube).

Performativity, audience, 'exhibition value', post hoc valuation criteria and audit alongside participation, transparency and accountability.

How can researchers be inside *and* outside the experimental arrangement?

Reflection and/or reflexivity.



## Participate!

From (end-)users to 'participation': dating, 'partners', marriages of convenience, bait and switch, contexts of intervention, experiments in relevance.

Problems or possibilities or politics of participation?

Who invited you? Opt-in/pushed out/cop out/clopen. Dark patterns.

# From methods to methodology?



Circuitous apprehension versus distributed cognition versus participation – eg choreographed objects, recursive ethnography, curation, recursive publics, parallel processing.

Exchange: crypto-currencies; banks; sharing; gift economy; sharing. Tokens and (proto-)types.

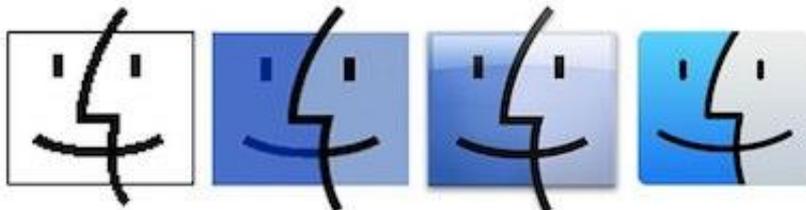
Interface design – methods to work the interface of ‘science’ and ‘society; not forgetting that this is also the interface of ‘subject’ and ‘object’ of research; friction – (not) what you see is what you (for)get.

There is no such thing as society (but) the social is us?  
Default social (Zuckerberg:  
<http://techcrunch.com/2010/04/21/zuckerbergs-buildin-web-default-social/>)

Abduction – guessing or a logic; patterns of abduction – selection of explanation, creation of concepts, justification (Schurz 2008); leaps of abduction.

Feeling and knowing – vectors of risk – what are we risking? narcissism; performing; gaming..

Experimental knowledge polities



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- Apologies if I have left anything out.