

The poetics of invention: what if design was humanities in action?

Keywords: poetics; humanities; design anecdotes; design practice

Humanities are known for their capacity to analyze **results** of a creative process. By humanities we mean the whole field of creative expression and analysis of arts and literature, including painting, photography, performing arts, etc. However, during this workshop, we invite participants to explore how designers use humanities ideas or concepts to structure their design **activities**. Our hypothesis is that “Humanities in action” can help designers by making explicit what happens in the process of designing itself. Can we look at oxymorons as the basis for divergence (Gentes, 2017)? What about the concept of “spatial montage” (Manovitch, 2001) to understand design composition? What does zooming-in and zooming-out tell us about design practice?

To address these questions, we focus on “design anecdotes” (Mikael, 2012), that is amusing or interesting stories that happened during the designing process of an artefact or service. These anecdotes will be used during the activity as a resource for discussing interesting social phenomena, concepts, process important to both design and humanities. This workshop is aiming to initiate the co-construction of interrelated databases, gathering a collection of design anecdotes and of concepts related both to the humanities and design, leading towards a thesaurus of humanities-based concepts concerning design.

1. Workshop Organizer/s

Organizer Name	Email	Affiliation
Annie Gentes (Lead and Contact)	Annie.gentes@telecom-paristech.fr	Telecom ParisTech, I3
Samuel Huron	Samuel.huron@telecom-paristech.fr	Telecom ParisTech, I3
Ilpo Koskinen	ilpo.koskinen@gmail.com	Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Pierre Lévy	p.d.levy@tue.nl	Eindhoven University of Technology

2. Context of Workshop

In the Order of Things, Foucault defined the Humanities as “that region **where the laws and forms of a language hold sway**, but where, nevertheless, they remain on the edge of themselves, enabling man to introduce into them the play of his representations, in that region arise the study of literature and myths, the analysis of all oral expressions and written documents, in short, **the analysis of the verbal traces that a culture or an individual may leave behind them**”(Foucault, 1994).

We want to take up this definition as an invitation to consider design research as “a region where the laws and forms of material, visual, and linguistic languages hold sway, but where, nevertheless, they remain on the edge of themselves, enabling man to introduce into them the play of his imagination”.

To do so, we need to make a clear distinction between social sciences and the Humanities. We believe that this distinction is useful for design because even if the two families of research connect in multiple ways, the contribution of social sciences on design is well documented while the contribution of the Humanities is less explored.

The role of the Humanities was traditionally limited to “documents by intention” (Couzinet, 2004), that is to specific objects produced to reflect on the world whether through words or images. However, humanities-based research about design have been fruitful to interpret designed objects, to compare them, and to relate them to History and Cultural studies (Margolin, 2015, Heskett, 2005). Designed objects embed a model of what the designer understands about users’ activities, what people value about their relationships, how the designers and users relate to the world. So all artificial objects can be analyzed as meaning making as demonstrated in such fields as anthropology of material culture (Keane, 2003), sciences and technologies studies, in particular Latour’s analysis of design meaning (Latour, 2008), and in design research (Buchanan, 1985) (Crilly et al., 2008), but also in research on the semiotics of design (Beyaert-Geslin, 2012), (Vihma, 1995).

This workshop wants to expand this scope to understand how the humanities could also help the study of design practices and rationales. Following the invitation by Koskinen (Koskinen, 2006) to study the convergence of media studies and design and by Monjou “to take advantage of the expertise of generative semiotics concerning the modalities of engendering meaning” (Monjou, 2009), we suggest that design organizes meaning making processes that introduce a distance to the world, or to elaborate on Foucault’s words that “remain on the edge of themselves, enabling man to introduce into them the play of his imagination”. This “distantiation” (Guillory 2010) gives designers the necessary leeway to play with materials. We therefore want to invite communities of designers, design researchers, and humanities scholars who are interested in design activities to join this workshop and share how designers explore and shape this autonomous plane of design. The

workshop is therefore opened (and not limited) to the following questions:

- Are media and mediation fundamental concepts to the understanding of design practices?
- How do words, from naming to narrating, contribute to generative design processes?
- How can we reflect on practices of collage, assemblages, installation, performance and how they can inform the way we think about the design of experience?
- How do montages or scenario writing impact time-oriented design practices?
- Is composition a fundamental design practice?
- What are the semiotic practices of designers?

To answer these questions, we find valuable to start from the participants' "design anecdotes" (Mikael, 2012). Mikael defines anecdotes as a resource or a tool for conducting social scientific research: "we study the content and enactment of anecdotes much as we might study the content and enactment of any other textual form that is implicated in interesting social phenomena". He also emphasizes another dimension of anecdotes that relates to their situation of enunciation: "anecdotalization entails a semiotic and material dialogue between past and present through, and with, bodies, memories, stories, objects and texts. If this conversation is any good, uninvited topics, unexpected insights and untoward issues should emerge, and in emerging should go on to feed the very process of anecdotalization". In other words, in the process of telling these anecdotes, the participants step back and work through and rediscover their own experience.

3. Planned Activities and Expected Outcomes

Goal of the half- day workshop

We want participants to question how the Humanities can help us better understand design practices. We suggest that to get useful insights for practitioners and researchers in design we can start from design anecdotes that can lead the process of interpretation and analysis and help both design researchers and design practitioners address design issues with renewed perspectives. During this half-day workshop, we will therefore collect design anecdotes (Lury and alii, 2013) and analyze them – when possible – with the help of concepts and methods coming from the humanities (either media studies, art and literature studies, semiotics, pragmatics, etc.).

Half-day program

Stage 1 Gathering of anecdotes	Each person writes one or more design anecdote (s)	15 min
Stage 2 Co-construction of concepts	The group reads the anecdotes and looks for concepts to describe the anecdotes	30 min

Stage 3 Choice and definition of 1 concept per group	The group picks up one concept that they want to define	30 min
Stage 4 Presentation of group results	All groups present the results: their anecdotes, the concepts, the concept that they defined	45 min
Stage 5 Final discussion on concept definitions	Discussion of the definitions and their relations to the anecdotes	30 min

Results

The workshop will begin the co-construction of inter-related data-bases:

- Collection of design anecdotes,
- Collection of concepts related both to the humanities and design,
- Start a thesaurus of humanities-based concepts concerning design.

We hope that the collection of anecdotes can be made available for design practitioners and design researchers as material for further analysis and anecdotalization.

4. Intended Audience

We are looking for people in all areas of expertise in design to compare practices and also people with a background in art and in the humanities. We would like at least 20 people to attend so that we can have 5 groups of 4 people working on the co-construction of anecdotes and concepts.

5. Length of Workshop

We envision a half-day workshop (see above for timing). From our experience, a half-day is just enough to offer participants an experience of the concepts, while allowing time to reflect on their anecdotes and to discuss some definitions.

6. Space and Equipment Required

We need a reconfigurable work space where attendants can work in sub groups then collectively share their findings. A classroom-like environment with large tables, a projector, a paper board, and a whiteboard would be ideal. We will provide all other equipment and materials.

7. Potential Outputs

This workshop has two potential outputs:

First, we want to better identify a community of researchers and practitioners who are interested in exploring the potential of humanities to explain design practices.

Second, the two co-constructed and inter-related collections based on design anecdotes and humanities related concepts could be a starting point to build a platform sharing humanities based concepts for design practices. We believe that these concepts could enrich the understanding of design practices.

About the Organizers:

Annie Gentes is professor at Telecom ParisTech and head of the Codesign and Media studies Lab. She analyzes productions in art, design, and engineering, and compares their conceptive activities to understand where their concepts and methods converge.

Samuel Huron is interested in creating and studying new tools to democratize dynamic information visualization authoring and in studying design methods applied to research. He is an associate professor in Design and ICT at Telecom ParisTech.

Ilpo Koskinen is a former sociologist who has been working as professor in industrial design in too many places since 1999. His most recent work expands his earlier work on constructive methodology into social design.

Pierre Lévy is assistant professor at Eindhoven University of Technology, NL. His research involves embodiment and Japanese philosophy to understand ways of designing for the everyday. He is currently the president of the European Kansei Group (EKG).

Pieter Vermaas is associate professor at Delft University of Technology, doing research on methodology and philosophy of design, focusing on knowledge represented by design methods and explaining the co-existing of different design methods. He edits the Design Research Foundations series.