THE MAKER+ANALYST GAME: MAKING SENSE OF AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the categorisations of maker and analyst, designer and researcher, through the account of an 'arranged marriage' between a team of 'makers' and an 'analyst'. We reflect on how the makers' interest in meeting an analyst who would be interested in analysing video material recorded during two sessions of a game activity, led us as a maker-analyst couple and team of co-authors, to re-create and play a third version of the game ourselves. In a spirit of participatory design, our express ambition was to welcome the perspectives that all co-authors bring, and to create not only a new paper but also a new team.

INTRODUCTION

The convenors of the PIN-C 2015 conference track 5 *Designing through things*, invited makers and analysts to apply to be matched together to jointly work on analysis of objects in social interaction. Makers would "*provide video footage of their (design) processes involving objects and be matched with an analyst who should work up a (sequential) analysis of whatever the two sides have agreed might be interesting*". Whilst entering this process, we found ourselves using the metaphor of an arranged marriage to understand our new roles and the relationship, and this paper is where we offer our reflections on what we learned from each other. A first crisis erupted as we realised early on that the maker teams' data did not fit the analyst's analytical framework as expressed in her abstract. Despite this mismatch, we decided we would try to work up a new focus for our partnership. To come together as a team,

the makers welcomed the analyst to their office in Stockholm. The visit began with playing an adapted version of a board game activity, prepared by the maker team - an approach hoped to kick-start work on a joint paper. As track 5 set out, the maker team offered video material for analysis as the basis for the collaboration. The makers' video material had been produced by participants using two earlier versions of the board game, and was now integrated as part of the third. Playing the game together was an experiment in supporting our dialogue and in help us get further, and more quickly, towards a shared vision for what our take on *Designing through things* would be, making use of the very same tool the maker team had hoped to analyse.

As we trace the account of what happened next in the arranged marriage of this maker-analyst couple, this paper explores the steps we took to try to come together as a group, the struggle to define our roles and discover research questions of mutual interest. The experience of playing the board game at the makers' office became central since it surfaced many of the questions we carried throughout the process and brought us together in time and space to negotiate their meaning.

A companion paper explains how we became interested in the role of instructions in shaping a team's work; this paper is about questioning the roles of 'maker' and 'analyst' and making sense of our pairing through a playful frame.

THE BACKGROUND: OUR STORIES

THE MAKERS' STORY
The maker team consisted of a group of four colleagues at a research institute, with backgrounds in anthropology, architecture, experience design and interaction design. Amongst other work, our team designs and facilitates what we call 'integrated workshops' to support a participatory design process. Integrated workshops seek to activate the perspectives and expertise of the participants through pre-engagement, strategically organising teams to work through a process of activities, as well as follow-up

opportunities for re-activating participants. Such integration work also involves bringing to life the way 'end users' experience their world, as a basis for decision-making and design. One approach to organising an integrated workshop, involves running a compressed version of a design process, using the format of a board game. The purpose is to mediate a playful and semi-structured dialogue between the players, facilitating turn taking and progression of the groups' collaborative process step by step.

As a team of 'makers' we submitted an abstract to PIN-C for the track *Designing through things* and volunteered for the matchmaking service pairing 'makers' with 'analysts'. In the role of makers, we were interested in sharing video footage with an analyst. The videos we had in mind had been made by participants of two different workshops in which the board game was used in adapted versions. Participants made videos prior to the activity that were used to begin the game and again as the last step of the game activity to conclude the process. We thought of these as "input" and "output" videos.

As designers of these games, we were looking for an analyst to provide their take on what happened during the games. What role did the game and materials play in their process? How did the teams 'design' their ideas through these things? How did they seem to make sense of material? As facilitators we were particularly interested in understanding more of what relation the input material had to the output material. By comparing them, could we come closer to an understanding of what the game process added as value for the participants?

THE ANALYST'S STORY
I come from a research department in a university, and my main interest is in understanding how learning can be supported. This has led me to study the role of designed objects and environments in human activity. I'd anticipated that the partner with whom I would be paired would have produced a made, physical object. The abstract I received, which stood as an introduction to my new partner, offered some video which was produced at the end of an activity with an object, but rather than recording an object-in-use, it had been made to share the ideas that groups had come up with as a result of their activities around the it.

Turning my attention to the potential of collaboration and co-production, and my thoughts to the whole idea of being paired up with a group of people I'd never met, I wondered what their own assumptions might be, and what the possibility of working with me might mean to them. What would they see in what I'd written about myself that might be meaningful or interesting to them? I emailed some questions to the maker team and received some back. I was interested in exploring expectations. I wanted to know what they hoped for from an analyst and I was curious about how they would have approached their video material if they had not been paired with me. The maker team expressed an

interest in the meanings the terms 'maker' and 'analyst' had and in the information I might need to know about the contexts in which the videos had been produced. Through this early communication it became clear that although there was a mismatch, we both felt that there was space to reframe or re-invent what we did together, and therefore we might be a good pairing for an innovative collaboration.

After this initial contact over e-mail, the first get-together of us as maker-analyst couple was a Skype meeting. In this, we all agreed that we needed to 're-invent' the terms of the introduction in order to work together, and that our first piece of work would involve us refashioning our goals and establishing just what our collaboration might be about.

THE MAKERS: PLANNING THE FIRST DATE

DESIGNING THE GAME
Straight after ending the first meeting on Skype with Sarah, we realised that we now entered a process similar to the ones for which we design 'integrated workshops', similar to the processes our game design was aiming at supporting. Our collaboration would not just be about Sarah analysing our data and us responding, but one of sharing ideas and perspectives. We needed to identify a topic relevant for all parties involved: makers, analyst, the conference track, as well as the conference audience.

When discussing how we could do this, we realised that a fun way to begin her visit to Stockholm would be to play the game activity ourselves. In fact, by adapting the game to our context we would introduce Sarah to our method by letting her experience them herself, and we would become co-participants rather than facilitators, of the method we wanted to reflect upon.

Similar to the previous versions, we sought to use the medium of the game to make tangible the 'things' we needed to work through and with in our process. For this we prepared the description of the conference track, the abstracts we had submitted and some of our initial questions regarding our collaboration. By working through the steps the game together, we hoped that the process would lead us to identify a focus for a joint paper, which could be summarized in a One-Shot video, exactly as our previous workshop participants had done.

VIDEO WATCHING TO GENERATE INTERESTS AND TOPICS 'THEME CARDS'
During the initial email exchange, Sarah had asked: "What kind of approach would you take yourselves when you analyse your material?" and "What research questions would you have?" Through this conversation, we realised that the game needed to contain research interests and possible topics, also from our side, represented as playing cards. We decided to analyse the videos from the two workshops to identify themes and thus an answer to Sarah's question.

When looking through the videos, many of them disappointed us in different ways. We felt their videos were weak, and therefore we got the feeling their work had not been rewarding, and thus the game not successful. We found ourselves searching for videos of 'good quality', assessing videos according to, for example, camera technique, usage of both visual and verbal communication, signs of collaboration, humour, and strong ideas. When comparing videos of 'better quality' with those of 'weaker quality' it seemed that in the stronger ones groups had taken ownership of the format, and shown initiative in shaping and recording the video, and had communicated ideas. On the other hand the weaker ones seemed to struggle following the instructions the game provided for this part of the process (which had suggested structuring the video according to the materials the group had produced at each step of the game). We felt we could trace the quality of the videos according to how closely groups had actually followed our instructions, but that it was in the opposite direction of what we had expected. We asked ourselves what we could have done differently to support the participants in creating good videos. How could each step of the game, the board and the material, and the instruction better support the groups to make good videos? How could we design for ownership of their end results? These questions generated themes noted as keywords on playing cards for the new version of the game.

OUR FIRST DATE: PLAYING THE MAKER+ANALYST GAME

THE ANALYST: MEET THE MAKERS

When we sat down to play together, we were grouped around a table, and another table behind us held paper copies of our abstracts and other material we'd shared, and the notebooks in which we had recorded ideas. In front of us was a printed board game, sets of pens, and there were small piles of coloured paper. On the wall was a whiteboard with a schedule for play, dividing our time that afternoon into specific activities. A timer had been set up to signal the start of each new activity. This was a setting that we all understood as a game, and we were readily able to turn rather playfully to thinking about what we had been asked to do.

THE MAKERS: STEPPING INTO THE ROLE OF PARTICIPANT

We suddenly found ourselves in the role of participants. In the game play, we were now following instructions we had prepared for ourselves. For each new step, we read the instruction and checked the timing to begin. But before we could take the step, a new, and, for us, unexpected conversation took place. When reading the instructions for the upcoming activity, and orienting towards the material it suggested we should use, we all began to share our interpretations of the instruction, negotiating its value and possible meaning in the process. For some steps, we decided to overrule the time

limit since we needed more and sometimes less, time. This conversation felt necessary, and appropriate, but it also had us ask a set of questions: Was this game really a good idea to support our work? How did the game support us to share our individual perspectives while together, especially Sarah's, since she was not part of the 'maker' team? How did it support us in co-creating a joint understanding? How did the material at hand guide and support our process? In this discussion, Sarah shared the notion of the game as a provider of 'liberating constraints' (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler 2000), and while turning and discussing the pre-prepared cards with themes, the cards presenting 'role' and 'instructions' seemed to speak to all of us, and we picked them out for further exploration. The questions we formed were 'What role does instructions play to support collaboration?" and 'What happens when we think of instructions as the material through which we design?'.

HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?

THE ANALYST'S REFLECTIONS

I discovered that for the maker or designer team at Interactive Institute, the notion of 'thing' or 'thingness' was less of a physical object than a 'material' - a loosely structured entity around which social processes happen. As an analyst, I came to see that the expectation of these designers is that it's through social processes that design takes place, and the skills of designers are co-ordination. The team is a group of craftspeople whose material is instruction and intervention. The skills of their work is in maintaining an awareness of what is going on, an ability to keep momentum going. They describe it as working with the pace, managing time constraints. To them their skills are a balancing act or of holding tension between traditional structure of discussion and a departure from traditions to do things that are less familiar, to offer the material of instructions through which groups and teams are able to put forward their differing interpretations and ideas, 'making' new ideas and relationship at one and the same time (Marjanović-Shane & Beljanski-Ristić 2008).

These designers, the Interactive Institute team, are the designers of *experiences through which groups of designers can carry out design work*. If the material of the Interactive Institute team is well placed and timely instructions go to groups of collaborators, then what is it that the groups that participate in those experiences design? This varies according to the nature of group work, its intentions and the premise underlying the gathering-together of people for the activity: in general, the underlying idea is one of innovation; so the answer would be 'something new', whether a new approach, a revision to existing procedures and processes, or a new idea for a product or service. If, as DePaula suggests, we consider design as a translation, or interpretative process (DePaula 2004) then working together through playing the board game in shared physical space has been a context for exploring multiple aspects of our

partnership, including our own interpretation of our roles, the translations of instructions by participant groups, our own translations of the instructions in the matchmaking process that have brought us together, and our perceptions and expectations of one another.

Seen this way the questions 'What did we design? What did we learn?' shift closer to the questions 'How and what did we transform, translate? What knowledge did we create?' In working towards making or designing a collaborative paper, working with the 'maker team' shifted my role and relationship. Through the course of the board game and other activities in which we participated - email, Skype, face to face conversation - I became something more of an 'analyst/designer', but, importantly rather than as description of myself as an individual external and separable from the collaboration, in a sense that existed within and was meaningful within the work we did together.

THE MAKERS' REFLECTIONS
Giving a group of four individuals with different background one title and identity, 'makers', has proven difficult to come to terms with. Not because we are not all makers, but because we are making in very different ways. Even at the point of submitting the abstract, members of our team began to question whether they identified with the title maker, and wondered about the distinction between a maker and an analyst. Further on in the process, while playing the game, we discussed what it is that actually makes up the design of the game, *Who made it?*. We realised that the game is also re-designed when played, and therefore all the participants are in fact contributing to the made thing.

More commonly we think of ourselves as design researchers. This identifier of design researcher seems to straddle both analyst and maker. The label of design researcher allows us to embrace a hybrid, group identity that for us contains both making and reflection in unity, quite similar to how Ingold asks: *What then is the relationship between making and thinking? To this the theorist and the craftsman would give different answers. It is not that the former only thinks and the latter only makes, but that the one makes through thinking and the other thinks through making. The theorist does his thinking in his head, and only then applies the forms of thought to the substance of the material world.* (Ingold 2013:6)

Playing the 'Maker+Analyst Game' helped us to step away from being either makers or analysts, and become team players. We were all making, reflecting on content together, exploring ideas together, and the game activity did produce ideas on what to write about together. In other words, playing the game created a third thing; us, the 'couple'.

By re-enacting a similar procedure that other groups of players had been through, the makers and analyst couple were narrating their experience at the same time as they were playing and experiencing the game. As an

'outsider', Sarah provided a unique position to describe the made 'thing' through her choice of words and references, which were different than ours. By doing so, she placed our work in a bigger context, by making available her arsenal of references. In a sense, she performed her role as analyst, merely by sharing her process of understanding, but also did so in a fruitful way coming in with a different background. Her role allowed for her to speak for no one but herself, which has not been the case for us as a team.

Therefore, in reflection on the process, we would also like to give credit to the role of the game, which, regardless of its various flaws, promoted turn taking between all five players, and not just the two entities 'makers' and analyst'. It enabled all of us to take the role of both maker and analyst and brake down the suggested barriers between these ways of contributing.

CONCLUSION
We resist the strict dichotomies of maker/analyst, designer/researcher, and practitioner/theorist. If this track is about designing through things, isn't it also about thinking through things? And thinking through designing? Thinking through making? This is perhaps the greatest learning from the process of being matched up as makers and analyst. In the game activity we tried to establish ourselves as a team, involved in what Ingold would call 'the art of inquiry' (Ingold, ibid). Instead of an analysis of the things of design, we were analysing with design, and re-designing with reflection and analysis. In this analysis, the board, the instructions, the game cards representing our previous questions, and the new materials produced during play, all shaped and guided the social activity of coming together to write a paper. This shared experience needed to be produced in order for us to perform analysis.

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