The Name of the Title is Hope

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ABSTRACT
This short piece, far too short for the space it demands, spins together a lively and unwieldy story about methods—the practices we in design and design research follow to both know about the world and to have an affect on it. We speculate on a mode of doing design inflected with questions about what we are doing when we study and intervene in the world. This is a project full with the hope of renewed designerly methods that make more of/in the world; that promote a flourishing of difference; and that might just lead to modest but better ways of living and dying together. Our philosophy (if that is not too grand a word for it) comes less from a “standing on the shoulders” of any one person, and more a thinking through and with feminist ways of knowing, doing, and being. Weaving into a mesh of ideas from the likes of Barad, Derrida, Dewey, Durkheim, Hacking, Haraway, Law, Stengers, and so on, we find there to be troubles between the ways we come to know the world (doings, methods or practices), and what we know (knowings or theories). The problematic distinction between such doings and knowings, and the murky worlds between them, open up a space for thinking-doing a world otherwise. When we come to accept that what we do and what we know are always already together, and that this ‘togetherness’ is all the world can be, then we, in design, are left with a beginning: “What worlds do we want to do-know?”

KEYWORDS
Feminism, multispecies relations, philosophy, scale.

INTRODUCTION
Interconnecting threads of theoretical work in the humanities, social sciences and philosophy are asking foundational questions of practice, and at the same time empirical (and interventionist) practices are demanding answers of theory. This is not the age-old scientific doctrine of theory

*We’ve kept the template title because it captures a parodic nature we feel fitting for this piece, and at the same time happens to reflect the hopeful ambitions of the authors.
needing practice (ideas requiring evidence), or vice-versa (results, and analysis, requiring theories) [5]. This is a wholesale unraveling of ways of knowing and doing.

In sociology (e.g., Puig de la Bellacasa [3]; Law [9]; Lury and Wakeford [10]; etc.), geography (Thrift [15]; feminist technoscience (Haraway [6]; Barad [2]; Tsing [16]); and the philosophy of science (Stengers[13])—to name but a few loose aggregates—questions are being asked about the separations between what we know—theory—and how we put what we know to work—practice. Pressing here is what is seen as the artificial separation between the two, with a rough sort of consensus arising that presupposes what we do is what we know, that in a sense we are always already performing the world through the entangled and unfolding relations between doing things with matter and coming to know what matters. Karen Barad (2007) puts this in slightly more concrete terms, showing that the documented deliberations and disagreements between Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr surrounding quantum physics were only made possible through certain experimental apparatuses; the apparatuses and the practices they afforded were what provided the conditions for knowing and deliberating about the world in very particular ways. As Barad illuminates, the theories of quantum entities as waves or particles (i.e., the wave-particle duality) can’t be reduced to the phenomena alone, but demand a frame of analysis that accommodates the experimental apparatus, the observer(s) and how all work together. The matter and practice must be included in what we know about the world, and how we know the world to be.

This may seem abstract, but it sets up a compelling opportunity for the practice-based work we aim to pursue in design and HCI. Broadly, if we take that materially intervening in the world is, as Donna Haraway refers to it, a “world-making” project—that is, it does or performs the world—then we can at the same time see this as an invitation to ask “what worlds do we want to live in?” Indeed, if we genuinely believe we have some material agency in world making, then it would be incumbent on us to go further than the metaphysical or hypothetical to ask “in what ways might we intervene to do worlds otherwise, to put into practice better ways of living and dying together?”

A HOPE FOR MORE

Putting the theories, knowings, philosophies, etc. to work presents us with hard questions, to say the least, and obviously not questions to be taken lightly. As a starting point, though, we find it is a ‘philosophy’ from contemporary feminist technoscience that invites us to engage in public and scientific “matters of concern” (Latour [8]), while holding open the conditions of possibility—being open to the conditions for more to happen, an expansion of relations, and an earthbound flourishing.

Anna Tsing is a particular source of inspiration. Her capacity to apply an ethnographic view to very specific things—things like mushrooms—and the practices that surround them [16], but at the same time capture the varied scales in which these things come into play, shows how matter can be entangled and performed in multiple worldings. Tsing has taken this capacity into the realm of
practice with the trans-disciplinary AURA at Aarhus University. Here, Tsing and colleagues from anthropology, biology, ecology, and the arts and humanities are intermingling to produce projects like the Feral Atlas, an effort to map co-species landscapes in the anthropocene, and speculate on possible futures. Such projects are sites of resistance, where narrow views permitted from single fields are contested, and diverse methods and theories are used to pay attention to the complexities impacting life and survival on the planet.

In our own work, we aim to build on projects like Tsing’s (as well as work from others, like Donna Haraway and Michelle Murphy [11, 12]). As with much of this work, what is at stake for us are questions of what constitutes life-nature and its ongoing flourishing (with/against human-nonhuman multi-species relations). Our aim though is to take another cut into these matters, drawing together the contemporary urge to count, compute and model non-human species on the one hand and, on the other, pay attention to the abundance of unintended but expansive multi-species co-minglings. The former can come to be invisible through the computational mechanics of counting and classification, while the scale at which the latter has impact is too hard to ignore.

Inevitably still tenuous, the broad goal of our work will be to put these modes of knowing and doing into conversation with designerly encounters (a conversation we have started elsewhere [14]). It will be to start with small, local encounters, of ecologists working with their model species, of computer scientists modelling ecosystems, of city dwellers living amongst urban foxes and other non-human critters. The relations here will be fostered through what we do so well in HCI and co-design: enabling sociomaterial entanglements and agencies to be voiced. Altogether, these materialised relations will be taken as sites to connect, to stretch, to rub together, to intervene in, and to see what more can be made, to test whether other worlds might be made possible, to build a philosophy and live a philosophy so as to speculate on better ways of living together.

Take for example: the PREDICTS database, modelling species biodiversity (in the face of anthropogenic pressures) from disparate data sources [7]; the radio-tracking of urban foxes [1, 17]; a neighbourhood fox pausing to look back at you (Fig. 1)(cf. Derrida [4]). What stories do these technologically worldings make possible, all together? What other kinds of multispecies and interspecies relations might we come to be open to and learn to live with and for?

It’s our hope that these entangled encounters and their trajectories will build into a more substantial body of reflective and creative practice, showing the transformation possible in different communities and throughout the global assemblies implicated in the production of capital, meaning and matter. We will demonstrate practical and concrete ways that philosophers, artists and all those invested in the human, more-than-human and post-human can impact by offering new worlds. What we might boldly call a feminist intersectional project will work directly with cultural transformation across different intersections in these sometimes overwhelming socio-technical structures and global flows, aiming to work with the entangled well enough and long enough to make a difference.
CONCLUSIONS

This proposal for a philosophy in the work we do in HCI—that stays with the trouble of practice-theory—is then an ambition to actively think and think actively, to put something that matters back into the world. The challenges and quandaries arising from a contemporary philosophy of knowledge, science and embodied practice provide a basis for interjecting an epistemological ethical, and ontological position into our design work in HCI. This is the "ethico-onto-epistem-ology" that Barad names ([2] p. 90), being put into action through design.
REFERENCES


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