

Appreciative Co-design: From Problem Solving to Strength-Based Re-authoring in Social Design

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Abstract: This paper outlines an approach to Social Design that departs the practice of design as ‘problem solving’ and advocates for Appreciative Co-design, an approach that seeks to nurture strengths and co-construct empowering stories that give life to living systems. As Social Designers we’re working with increasingly vulnerable people in immensely difficult circumstances, and sometimes their lives become constructed around a ‘problem story’. These participants can be difficult to engage in the co-design process, they can be resistant to change or find it difficult to envision positive future alternatives. And as Social Designers it’s now our role to shift their perspective. This involves facilitating a process of social transformation within the design process itself, which is a new task for our practice. For guidance this paper explores Psychotherapy and Organisational Development which are other transformative practices that offer valuable strategies on shifting problem oriented mindsets and motivating people to construct new empowering narratives.

Keywords: Social Design; strength-based; narrative; re-authoring

Introduction

As Social Designers we’re working with vulnerable people in increasingly difficult circumstances, and our ambitious practice is demanding more of them and more of us. At times we find ourselves working with communities that have long histories of adversity, to the point that the narrative of the community itself becomes constructed around a “problem story”, this can influence people’s language, behaviour and even identity. Participants in these circumstances can sometimes be difficult to engage in the co-design process, they may be resistant to change or struggle to envision a positive future reality. And as Social Designers it’s now our role to shift their perspective, which is a new task for our practice. Previously we worked on the basis of designing products or environments that



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would bring about social change, but now we're needing to facilitate social transformation within the design process itself. In this position we're adopting the role of Social Worker, Applied Behavioural Scientist and sometimes even Therapist, and although we're equipped with toolkits to deliver positive outcomes we're untrained in the psychological complexities of these new demanding relationships. How do we disarm problem oriented stories that have taken hold of participant's lives and shift their mindsets in a process that is supported, meaningful and productive?

This paper attempts to explore this challenging question by drawing on other transformative practices that have greater experience in stimulating change through direct engagement with the social environment. It will first look at Psychotherapy which has a long history of collaborating with vulnerable people and offers valuable strategies on shifting the mindsets of "difficult clients". The field of Organisational Development will then be explored as it offers comparable theories on motivating groups to adopt new social patterns.

In their efforts to shift unproductive mindsets both practices have begun to depart problem solving approaches and are moving toward strength based narrative inquiry. Here the focus shifts from solving the challenges in a problem story toward nurturing strengths and co-constructing a more empowering narrative. The value this could bring to design will be discussed in the final section before proposing an agenda to develop comparable approaches within Social Design practice. But first, I offer an introduction to Social Design and the difficult client.

Social Design and the difficult client

For decades academics and practitioners have called for designers to turn their efforts toward those in social need (Melles, de Vere, & Mistic, 2011; Whiteley, 1993). Papanek (1972) instigated the initial call for designers to turn their gaze toward the "huge population of the needy and the dispossessed" who "suffer design neglect" (Papanek & Fuller, 1972, p. 59), amongst which he mentioned those who are disabled, disadvantaged, suppressed by racism, incarcerated or living in poverty. More recently Margolin and Maroglin identified that Papanek's efforts "provided evidence that an alternative to product design for the market is possible, but they have not led to a new model of social practice" (Margolin & Margolin, 2002, p. 24). In response they offer a "Social Model" of design which is comparable to Social Work; a method of "ethological" intervention that seeks to understand the interactions between client and their physical and social environment. However they offer little guidance on the daily interactions of a Social Working approach, or little recognition that vulnerable clients may be more challenging to work with.

If people have a long history of difficult experiences they can develop a mindset that problems are the status quo, within Psychotherapy White & Epston (1990) refer to this as resignation to a 'problem-saturated story'. I have experienced this within the last 7 years of Social Design practice, I've collaborated with people in immensely difficult circumstances, including men in maximum security prison, refugees and indigenous families in remote social

housing. At times I've met whole communities who seem stuck in problem-saturated stories. In some contexts this can also stem from risk aversion as well as adversity, like prison or nursing homes which are prone to incidents and the consequences can be serious. As a result the language, practice and environmental design all become constructed around the potential of problems occurring.

I've experienced that participants in these circumstance can be difficult to engage in the co-design process. Their problem oriented mindsets often inhibit them in envisioning positive future states, and groups can easily find themselves in downward spirals of problem listing. The co-design methods available to Social Designers often draw on Design Thinking which is a problem solving process capable of producing rich knowledge and transformative outcomes (Cross, 2006). However, the language used and focus of inquiry is often problem focused in itself, which can be unhelpful in efforts to shift participant's deficit thinking. The fields of Psychotherapy and Organisational Development have recognised the limitations of problem solving approaches and have thus developed practices that seek to disarm problem oriented stories through the co-construction of new empowering narrative.

Narrative in Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is a transformative process that involves practitioners guiding clients through personal and social transformation. Modernist psychotherapy involved the diagnosis and treatment of cognitive dysfunction, but in 1990 American Psychologist Kenneth Gergen called for a Post-Modernist approach, he argued that the language and setting of former practices were oriented around deficit based storytelling, which created un-empowering hierarchies between client (presenting inadequacy) and practitioner (as problem solver). Instead he introduced the Constructivist concept of a "Generative Theory" which would disrupt the clients' habitual assumptions and "open new alternatives for action" (Gergen, 1990, p. 33). Leahy later described the Constructivist approach as "the co-creation (with the therapist) of new meaning structures." (Leahy & Dowd, 2002, p. 22).

Psychotherapy has extensive experience of collaborative with vulnerable people, and thus offers valuable definitions of the "difficult client" and strategies for shifting problem oriented mindsets. Beyond the challenges of specific psychological conditions difficult clients are discussed as those resistant to change or hard to engage in transformative processes (Ellis, 1985; Hanna, 2002; Kottler, 1992). Many factors contribute to resistance but a common theme relates to clients' reluctance to challenge habitual world views (Mahoney, 1991; Meichenbaum & Gilmore, 1982), and if people have conscripted to problem saturated stories they can develop mindsets that are particularly rigid and resistant to change (Strupp & Binder, 1984). Before we discuss strategies for shifting mindsets I offer a more detailed outline of the problem saturated story.

The construction of a Dominant Story

Constructivist Psychotherapy believes that develop life stories based on experiences, linked in sequence, across time:

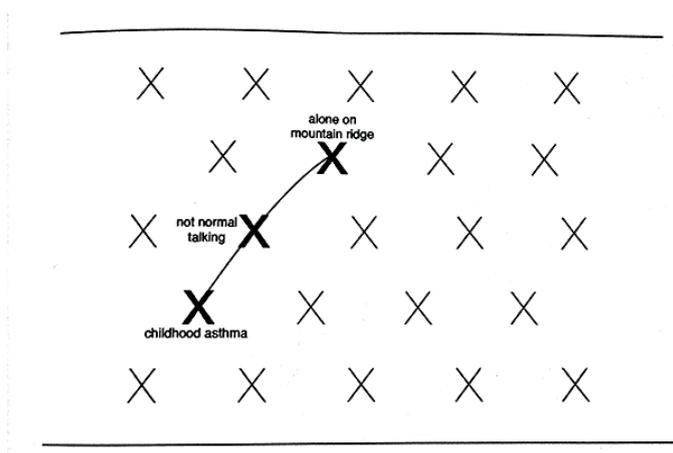


Figure 1: Linking events into a good storyline: “Lonely boy” (Denborough, 2014, p. 2)

People construct meaning around these experiences and order them into a “dominant” life story (Russell, 1992; White & Epston, 1990). Once conclusions are drawn on the nature of this story it’s easy for people to collect new experiences that support their perceived narrative, and eventually these narratives influence perceptions, behaviour and identity. This can be challenging for participants if their dominant story is one that is problem saturated. Morgan (2000) describes that:

“These thin conclusions, drawn from problem-saturated stories, disempower people as they are regularly based in terms of weaknesses, disabilities, dysfunctions or inadequacies” (Morgan, 2000, p. 13).

If people internalise these oppressive ideals then stories of strength and resilience take a back seat and soon people find themselves stuck in “self propagating vicious cycles” (Strupp & Binder, 1984, p. 73).

Re-authoring in Narrative Therapy

Narrative Therapy emerged as practitioners noticed the “generative” and “ingenerative” nature of different clients’ stories within Psychotherapy (Neimeyer & Stewart, 2001, p. 134). A practice of “re-authoring” (White & Epston, 1990) emerged as a way to disarm problem stories and establish space for clients to author new stories that are more likely to increase well-being and empower a positive future (Freedman & Combs, 1996; McLeod, 1997; Russell & Van den Broek, 1992). Within this process clients are encouraged to reinterpret experiences, draw new meanings and develop new perspectives.

“As the person becomes aware that there are more ways to tell the story, as the initial, ‘stuck’ narrative is deconstructed, he or she becomes to adopt a story that is more satisfying, meaningful or tolerable than the original” (McLeod, 1997, pp. 109-110)

The concept of “Re-authoring” originates in the work of Myerhoff (1982) but was formalised in practice by White and Epston (1990). The process seeks to detach clients from a problem story, identify moments of strength and resilience, reconfigure new truths into a “counter story” and then thicken the counter story through supported implementation. Within this

process White and Epston explain that a valuable way to detach clients from their problem story is to 'externalise the problem' (White & Epston, 1990). When people enter therapy their problem story is usually internalised; for example "*I am depressed*" (M. M. Gergen & Gergen, 2006, p. 114), the process of externalising encourages participants to frame the problem as a separate entity - "*the depression*". This allows people to objectively see their relationship with the problem, map its occurrence and identify strengths which have gone unnoticed (White & Epston, 1990).

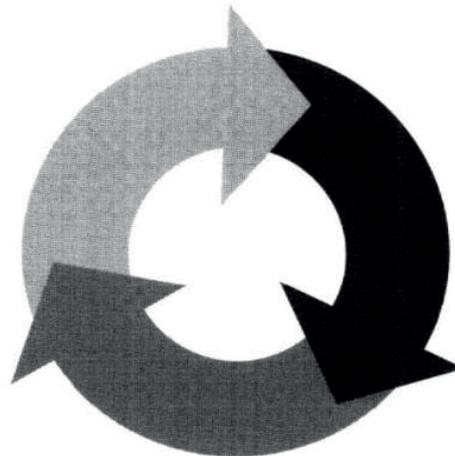
The process is less focused on *solving* the client's problem story and more concerned with nurturing a counter story. As clients recall their experiences the practitioner listens for "unique outcomes" (Goffman, 1968), which are moments of strength and resilience in the face of the problem story. Questioning strategies help clients to string these unique outcomes into a new counter story, and then encourages them to draw new meanings from the alternative perspective – "How could this new story affect your life and relationships?". The construction of new meaning within this process is through iterative reflection, where new knowledge is developed gradually rather than a drastic shift into unfamiliar territory (Gergen, 1990; McLeod, 1997). White describes that "every telling or retelling of a story, through its performance, is a new telling that encapsulates, and expands on the previous telling" (White & Epston, 1990, p. 13). Ungar (2001) offers a graphic representation of this iterative construction of new meaning, which cycles through three stages:

Reflecting

Phase One: Reflecting

Conversations that:

- 1) Contextualize past events
- 2) Deconstruct memories
- 3) 'Externalize' problems
- 4) Highlight exceptions to narratives of vulnerability



Defining

Phase Three: Defining

Conversations that:

- 1) Explore ways to demonstrate resilience
- 2) Locate support for a new identity
- 3) Review progress
- 4) Anticipate future growth

Challenging

Phase Two: Challenging

Conversations that:

- 1) Thicken description of narratives of resilience
- 2) Invite 'audience' participation
- 3) Explore talents

Building Narratives of Resilience

Figure 2: Building Narratives of Resilience (Ungar, 2001, p. 65)

Leahy (2002) suggests that difficult clients may need more iterations to detach from their problem story and that visual tools can provide further assistance:

“[if problem] schemers are very entrenched and resistant to change, more repetition is required than in traditional cognitive therapy...In general, these techniques depend less on verbal (left brain) processing and more on imaginal (right-brain) processing” (Leahy & Dowd, 2002, p. 20).

Narrative Therapy (NT) practitioners thus draw on visual tools like life maps populated with symbols (Ungar, 2001), flashcards, “Two Chair” dialogue (conversation between client and problem story) (Young & Brown, 1994) and certificates to award graduation from problem

stories (White & Epston, 1990). These tools assist clients to map the influences of problems and constructively produce new perspectives.

In improving the *adoption* of new narratives Russell (1992) outlines that the *type* of counter story is important. He offers two precursors - it must be more compelling than the problem story, portraying achievement and generally more useful behaviour. Secondly it should seem achievable and somewhat familiar, ie. not fall too far from clients' current meaning structure (Russell & Van den Broek, 1992). The practitioner does not provide a *different* frame, the client is guided to construct a new story from *within*. Morgan (2000) agrees that it's "not just any alternative stories, but stories that are identified by the person seeking counselling as stories by which they would like to live their lives" (Morgan, 2000, p. 14). This is why *co-construction* is important as clients are given full agency in the re-authoring process. Practitioners are aware that Psychotherapy is often daunting, it questions clients' worldviews and challenges them to construct an unknown reality (Newman, 2002). Practitioners are therefore trained to guide clients through this process in ways that are supportive, meaningful and productive.

Narrative in Organisational Development

Organisational Development (OD) is an Applied Behavioural Science and another practice which seeks to facilitate social transformation (Huntington, Gillam, & Rosen, 2000). The field has also recognised the transformative abilities of narrative:

"Usually, dominant storylines, or macronarrative, is used to understand the past, present, and future of an organisation, and a change in that storyline can occur as dozens of micro narratives are collected and told that allow a new dominant storyline to emerge" (Busch & Kassam, 2005, p. 168)

Narrative techniques within OD also emerged within the early 90's, following Morgan's *Images of the Organization* which explored the ability to shift organisational meaning through the application of different metaphors; he applies various frames to the organisation, like a "machine" or "family" and discusses the effects these narratives could have on it's workers (Morgan, Gregory, & Roach, 1997). Following this, a practice called Appreciative Inquiry (AI) emerged, with specific focus on stimulating organisational change through the co-construction of new narratives. The "Appreciative" focus seeks to draw out strengths and empowering experiences that are built into a "positive core", it's described as inquiry into aspects that "give life" to living systems (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2011) or into "the best of what is, in order to imagine what could be" (Bushe, 2013, p. 1). AI was developed as a way to replace the judgemental nature of problem solving approaches with more uplifting methods of inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2011).

"In AI, the arduous task of intervention gives way to the speed of imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism, and spiraling diagnosis, there is discovery, dream, and design". (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001, p. 3)

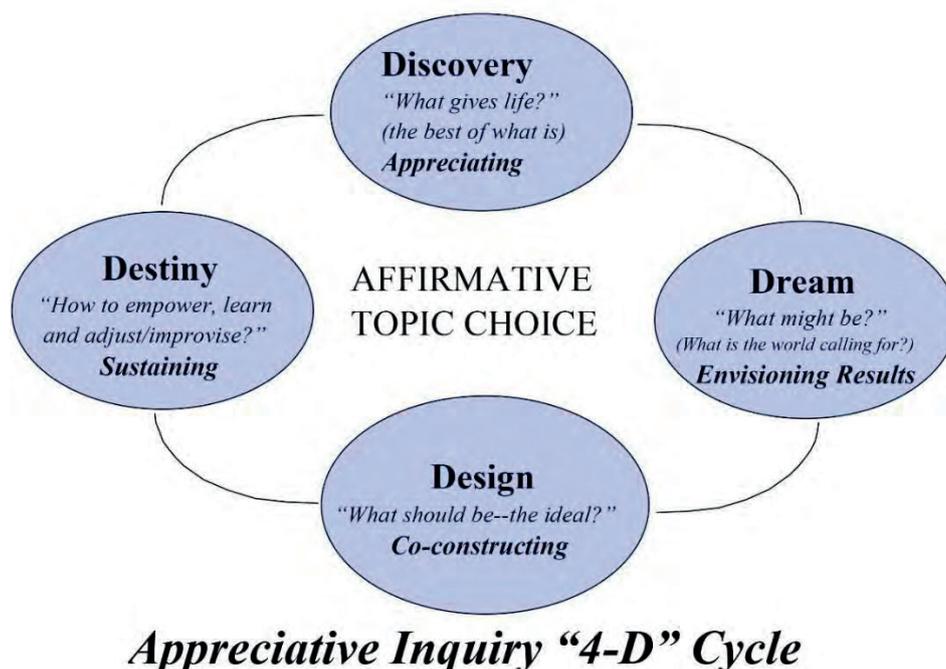


Figure 3: Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001, p. 28)

We see here a similar process to NT. Discovery (into the best of what is) Dream (envisioning new empowering narrative), Design (constructing and richly describing the counter story), Destiny (implementing and strengthening the counter story).

Within this process strategic positive questioning seeks to draw out strengths and empowering experiences (Gergen & Gergen, 2006). The questions aim to shift mindset in similar ways to NT with the disruption of a former story and adoption of a counter story. However it doesn't begin with reflection on a problem story, instead the counter story is constructed from the beginning, the very first question is appreciative and thus invites change from the onset (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2011). The invitation to try on new perspectives is the act which disrupts the prevailing mindset. Cognitive scientist Francisco Varela refers to this as “suspension, removing ourselves from the habitual stream” (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2005, p. 45). This is not an attempt to forget the problems that exist but sheds light on our assumed perspectives. Then like in NT, the act of performing the new narrative encourages it's adoption (Pourdehnad, Warren, Wright, & Mairano, 2006). In improving the likelihood of participants adopting new narratives AI offers similar guidelines, the counter story should be both *compelling* and built around familiar qualities found *within* the organisations' positive core. This removes the need for incentives or coercion, and instead generates enthusiasm (Bushe, 2013; Gergen & Gergen, 2006) and mobilises people via the heliotropic principle – an observation that people naturally move toward things that give them energy (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2011).

Cooperrider also uses the term “generative metaphor” and discusses it’s particularly helpful in “circumventing common resistances to change” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001, p. 10). During the use of Appreciative Inquiry in prison research Liebling (1999) also recognised the approach’s value in collaborating with difficult client groups:

“This positive approach may be useful within the environment fraught with negative interactions and relationships and much focus on the problem” (Liebling, Price, & Elliott, 1999, p. 75).

She highlights that within the prison people can feel persecuted, misunderstood or undervalued, challenges are well explored and meaning is constructed around problems. Within this context AI offers opportunity to enter a cognitive territory that’s rich and often under-explored. Liebling explains this encourages participants to “re-read” their scripts, through which she witnessed the adoption of new narratives:

“The inquiry revealed not only a remarkable richness of data but also a change of dynamic, from dependency to self-reliance, as the interviewees began to see themselves not as victims but as responsible actors” (Liebling et al., 1999, pp. 78-79).

Here we see another practice where the *process* of strength based narrative inquiry is transformative in itself, having the ability to construct “social architecture” (George, Farrell, & Brukwitzki, 2002, p. 38) which is open to new language, practice and identity.

A closer look at Social Design:

The practice of Social Design aims for transformative objectives which are similar to NT and AI - moving participants through a process of disrupting the status quo, then designing and implementing a new reality. However unlike NT and AI Social Design has less experience in the complexities of managing social transformation within the process itself. As we tackle increasingly ambitious challenges in more complex social systems we are finding ourselves needing to re-design the social architecture within the process of re-designing the physical architecture (Dorst, 2015; Norman, 2010). For instance the Co-design process may need to align stakeholder views and generate a collective future narrative *as well as* design the artefacts or environment to support that vision.

To illustrate this process I offer reflection on a recent project at the Designing Out Crime Research Centre, Sydney, to co-design an Intensive Learning Centre within a maximum security prison. A brief was provided by Corrective Services New South Wales (CSNSW) to design a space that would contrast the social and physical architecture of maximum security prison and stimulate a motivation to learn through a space that felt like an adult education environment. It was the first purpose-built education facility within a NSW maximum security prison and it called for new practice and new facilities. At times, maintaining an optimistic co-design process was challenging within a prison which is commonly a problem oriented context – the physical and social environment are constructed around the punishment of past problems, the management of present problems and the prevention of future problems. At times we were met with resistance, particularly from inmates who saw

little value in the project, were sceptical it would happen and didn't believe their contributions would be listened to. However the co-design process involved the construction of a *current* social architecture which would support the project (control groups, champions, inmate delegates and a culture of optimism and innovation). It then involved developing a collective vision of a *future* social architecture (the nature of new practice, language and manifestoes on 21st century learning and relationships within a Therapeutic Community). Throughout this process there was iterative development of design concepts that materialised and questioned the developing social architecture.

Here we see design practice entering a new realm which combines Product Design and Organisational Development. Social change is intertwined throughout the process *and* outcome, and learnings occur in conversation between the simultaneous growth of social and physical architecture. In this new era of design practice Norman (2010) reflects that "designers have become applied behavioral scientists, but they are woefully undereducated for the task" (Norman, 2010). The focus of Design literature is still primarily oriented toward problem solving processes that generate a desired outcome. We seldom discuss the experience of vulnerable participants within the process of social change, or are we fully aware of the influence our language and focus of inquiry has on participants' relationship with problem oriented stories.

The language and focus of inquiry in design practice

Despite the solution focused nature of design thinking it's conventional practices are based on a series of problem solving activities (Cross, 2006). Designers spend most of their project time focusing on the problem (Dorst & Kovari, 2012) the language we use and our topics of inquiry are also generally problem oriented; Designers are given a brief containing a problem statement (hard ones are "wicked problem"), they then try to understand, define or frame the problem before developing a range of potential solutions, these solutions are developed iteratively and implemented before an evaluation tests their ability to solve the problem, reflection then offers new understanding of the problem they began with.

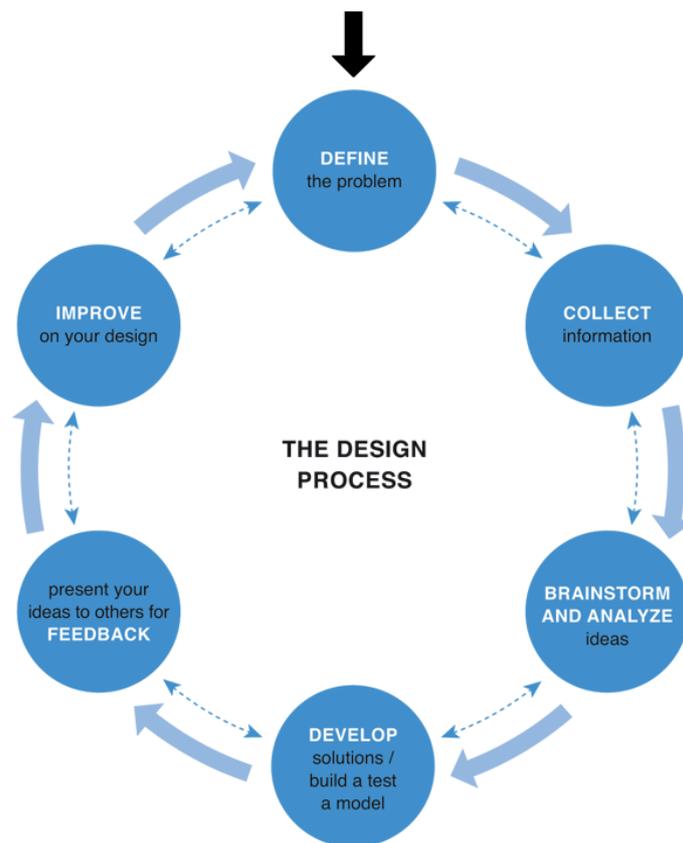


Figure 4: The Design Process (discoverdesign.org)

Despite co-design practices which place designers as facilitators (Sanders & Stappers, 2008) a process that revolves around problem solving may still establish a hierarchy between designer as problem solver and community as problem holder. Particularly in the case of difficult clients groups, we're attempting to shift social architecture away from a problem oriented story, toward the adoption of a new empowering language, narrative and identity. In achieving this, I suggest there is need to develop further knowledge on strength based re-authoring techniques within Social Design practice. There are some examples of strength based and/or re-authoring practices beginning to emerge within design and broader fields of social development. Although the discussion is still in it's infancy a valuable dialogue is growing between problem solving and strength based approaches.

A broader look at similar approaches

A few strength-based approaches are briefly outlined below, with particular interest given to their use of narrative, interaction with the physical and social architecture and interest in problem oriented participants.

Positive design

Positive Design is a practice which combines Sociology's "Positive Lens" with Design Thinking, it seeks to design for human well-being, and stems from the practice of

Appreciative Inquiry (Avital, Boland, & Lyytinen, 2009; Cooperrider, Avital, Foster, & Forster, 2004). It's primary focus is still in the social realm of Organisational Development and is concerned with transformative *processes* (Avital et al., 2009; Cooperrider et al., 2004). In occasions where Positive Design is applied to the development of physical *outcomes* the discussion returns to the impact of the artefacts (Desmet & Hekkert, 2007; Desmet & Pohlmeier, 2013; Jordan, 2002; Tiger, 1992) rather than transformation through the co-development of both physical and social, "[the intention is] to *result in designs* that stimulate human flourishing" [italics added] (Desmet & Pohlmeier, 2013, p. 5).

Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability

Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability (DESIS) is a strand of design practice which also seeks to instigate social change. It's objectives and processes are often considered similar to Social Design, however Manzini attempts to separate the two with the following: Firstly Social Design is usually concerned with vulnerable people who face "particularly problematic situations" (Manzini & Coad, 2015, p. 64) whereas DESIS is concerned with social change for *any* community, and secondly the term "social" is used differently within each practice. In Social Design it refers to broad *social* problems which are "not dealt with by the market or the state" (Manzini & Coad, 2015, p. 65), whereas the term social within DESIS refers to the practice's method of instigating change via *social* innovation - interventions which alter the way a social environment operates. Although he does conclude that the line between them is blurry:

"Social design is increasingly oriented toward social innovation, recognising that this offers the only chance for solving the problems it traditionally deals with. In turn, design for social innovation, facing the extension of the economic crisis, is more and more frequently involved in initiatives that involve socially sensitive issues" (Manzini & Coad, 2015, p. 65)

It is this type of Social Design discussed herein this paper, one focused on participants in particularly problematic situations, but one which seeks to instigate change via social innovation – ie. it moves beyond problem solving through the design of technical physical solutions to a process which simultaneously seeks to alter the social environment, allowing new perspectives, behaviour and relationships to emerge. The two realms are however closely interrelated. Manzini discusses this interrelation within DESIS; "social innovation occurs when people, expertise, and material assets come into contact in a new way that is able to create new meaning and unprecedented opportunities" (Manzini & Coad, 2015, p. 77). He thus defines DESIS as a process of generating new meaning structures, and as discussed in NT and AI this is achieved by disrupting "normal" perspectives and social patterns and creating *enabling ecosystems* which are likely to foster alternative behaviour. Focusing on the design of enabling ecosystems allows participants to adopt more meaningful roles within the design process, they become *people with assets* rather than *people with problems*, but this requires a paradigmatic shift in the way designers face the development process (Manzini & Coad, 2015).

Manzini discusses the role of storytelling in navigating future realities. He suggests that stories are particularly helpful in “reconstructing identity” through the “rebuilding of relationships between people and the space they live in” (Manzini & Coad, 2015, p. 126). He does however urge designers to be mindful of the way stories are handled, and ensure participants understand the role stories play within the process. Especially where future gazing is concerned we should be mindful of participant’s capabilities and expectations and not engage them in story telling that may be ‘manipulative’ or merely ‘rhetorical’, he suggests constructing broader “design oriented scenarios” rather than personal narratives, as they are more open to reinterpretation and can be seen as objective tools to further discussion (Manzini & Coad, 2015). Although DESIS’ is not a process of strength based re-authoring it offers valuable insights on the use of narrative within design and reminds us that participant capabilities and expectations should be carefully considered.

Asset Based Community Development:

Asset Based Community Development (ABDC) is a form of sustainable development which primarily focuses on the economic growth of low income communities. It seeks to develop services, programs and policy that better link the resources within a neighbourhood (Kretzmann, McKnight, & Network, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Although the need for new physical infrastructure may arise it’s typically not a design process and is usually concerned with the social realm (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

The approach was developed by McKnight and Kretzmann (1993) as an alternative to needs-based approaches that they found had “devastating consequences for residents” (Kretzmann et al., 1993, p. 4), including dependencies on external support and the reinforcing of deficit perspectives. ABCD begins with a detailed survey of a community’s existing assets which are collated into a ‘Capacity Map’ that plots the skills, resources and capacities of individuals, associations and institutions (Kretzmann et al., 1993). People are then mobilised toward development through a plan which enables more efficient use of community resources. In this regard Mathie and Cunningham (2003) liken ABCD to AI in it’s mobilisation of people through the heliotropic principle, which they explain can have transformative abilities, providing a community the opportunity to “outgrow a problem” (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003, p. 479). Story telling *is* used to discover strengths and assets (Kretzmann et al., 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Cunningham & Mathie, 2002) but is seldom discussed as a tool to construct future realities. With a development focus on the linking of assets it’s the Capacity Map which primarily supports future planning (Kretzmann et al., 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Cunningham & Mathie, 2002). In a more recent paper however, Ennis (2010) discusses that ABCD enables communities to see what they *have* rather than *need*, which he likens to Narrative Therapy in it’s ability to rethink community narrative (Ennis & West, 2010). Unfortunately it’s difficult to find subsequent examples which implement re-authoring approaches within ABCD.

Frame Creation

Frame creation is an approach to design practice developed by Dorst (2003), and in effect, is a process of re-authoring. It has been implemented within Social design and DESIS projects and although it's based on a problem solving it's concerned with shifting narratives that are 'stuck' (Dorst, 2015). It seeks to develop social and physical architecture simultaneously (produce novel outcomes along-side shifts in organisational practice) as physical outcomes will only "make sense" if supported by deeper social transformation (Dorst, 2015, p. 117). The process' approach to "re framing" (Dorst, 2003, 2015; Lawson & Dorst, 2013) builds on the work of Schön who introduced the value of "frames" (Schön, 1983) and "generative metaphors" (Schön, 1993) to design practice. Dorst has formalised the concept into the Frame Creation approach and expresses that:

"The quality of design work produced depends as much on the ability of the designer to frame the problem relevantly and productively, as on the ability to arrive at an interesting solution from this standpoint" (Lawson & Dorst, 2013, p. 50).

The process begins with a stage called "Archaeology", which like NT maps the problem story in order to "delve deeply into the world of the problem owner in order to understand the past history of the problem" (Dorst, 2015, p. 74). The process then steps back from the original framing and gathers insights on participants' needs and values, these are then clustered into themes that inform the development of a new frame. The new frame offers an alternative "problem situation" to solve (Dorst, 2003, 2006, 2015). Dorst discusses that organisational change can be difficult if focus remains on the original framing of the problem, as attempts to generate solutions draw on well-worn language and rituals which offer little opportunity for innovation. Reframing provides a *different* problem to solve and may therefore free organisations from habitual thought patterns.

Despite similar objectives of re-authoring unproductive stories Frame Creation is still presented as a problem solving process, this establishes a number of key differences when compared to the strength based re-authoring practices of NT and AI:

Language: is still oriented toward problem solving

Focus on the problem: spends the majority of time understanding the problem rather than developing a solution

Location of problem: Unlike NT which seeks to detach the problem from the client Frame Creation refers to participants as the "problem owner"

Orientation of counter story: Frame Creation offers a different "problem situation", rather than a strength based counter story.

Nonetheless the approach illustrates that re-authoring is valuable within the design process and is able to stimulate social and physical transformations in situations that are stuck in habitual patterns.

Discussion:

In exploring a range of transformative practices we have seen that strength based and/or re-authoring approaches have the ability to shift language, perspectives and roles that are stuck in problem oriented mindsets. Within community development some problems do require quick resolution through technical physical solutions, and here, as designers our problem solving skills serve us well. But as we begin to engage with the social architecture directly our problem solving approaches can be limiting, we now take on new challenges of designing social ecosystems which enable life to flourish...which requires an entirely different approach.

By learning from other practices we see that strength based re-authoring approaches offer meaningful and empowering ways to co-construct the stories people live by. These practices cover some bases which are relevant to Social Design but few clearly articulate a practice which specifically take a **re-authoring** approach to co-developing **physical and social** architecture, within a **design process** intending to **move problem oriented participants** toward social transformation. I call for the development of such an approach, and offer some initial guiding principles.

Towards Appreciative Co-design: A strength-based re-authoring approach to Social Design practice

Further development is needed to detail an Appreciative Co-design approach, but in essence it's activities will aim to shift problem oriented stories through the co-construction of new empowering narrative. It's more than a focus on strengths to guide change, the key lies in understanding the stories people live by, why they get stuck on certain narratives and the role new stories play in mobilising people toward social change. In this regard storytelling is not simply a tool to identify strengths and successes it seeks to drive social innovation by encouraging communities to *re-design the stories themselves*. It's a facilitated design process which enables participants to navigate these alternative ways of being alongside the construction of new systems, tools and environments that allow their counter story to flourish. It will move away from deficit based language and focus of problem solving and seek to nurture strengths and qualities that give life to participants. In doing so it hopes to disarm problem oriented mindsets which are resistant to change, and encourage the adoption of new narratives. A process of re-authoring which may be transformative in itself.

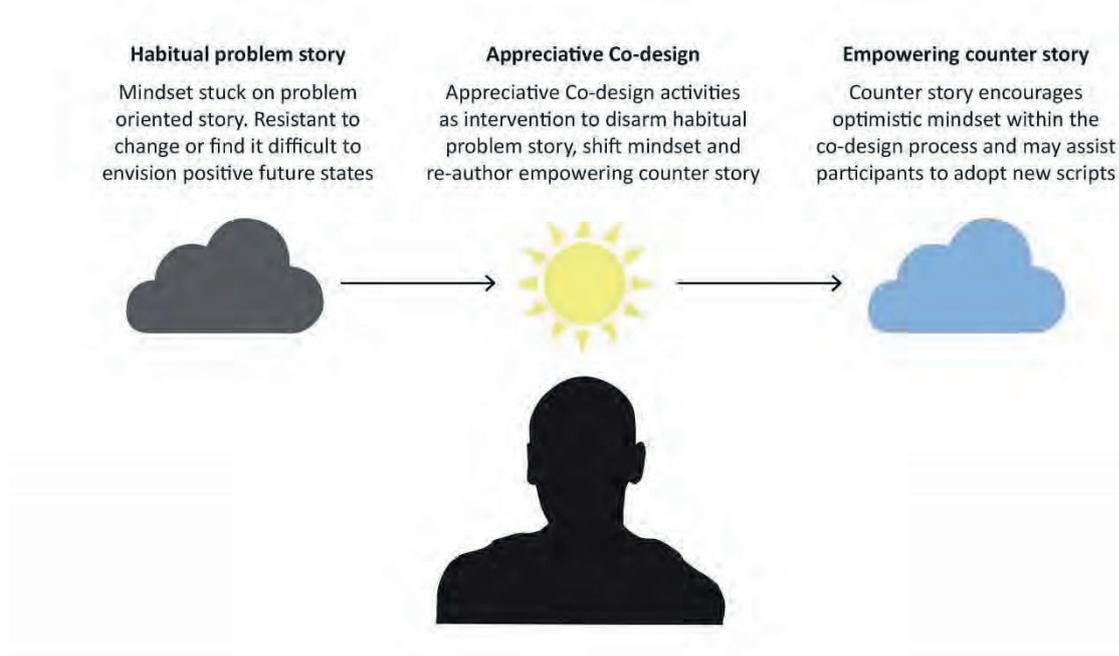


Figure 5: Shifting mindset through positive intervention of Appreciative Co-design activities

I propose some initial guiding principles:

- The approach will be a process of strength-based re-authoring
- It will seek to disarm habitual problem oriented stories by:
- Externalising the problem - encouraging participants to detach from their identity as problem owner
- Shifting from deficit to appreciative language which is life nurturing
- Focusing inquiry around affirmative topics such as strengths and empowering experiences which mobilise people through the heliotropic principle
- Actively constructing a new counter story
- The counter story isn't simply a "different" perspective but specifically a story which brings life, and is one which is compelling, constructed from familiar affirmative topics, achievable and not too far from current meaning structures
- The cyclical nature of design practice will allow new meaning to be constructed iteratively around the counter story
- The process will not seek to "solve a problem" but to simultaneously construct a new social and physical architecture that enables the counter story to flourish
- It will consider the process and outcome as change agents and thus seek to move participants through the change process in ways that are supportive, meaningful and productive
- It will manage expectations by considering participant and contextual capabilities during periods of future gazing

The challenges in departing a problem solving approach:

More practice is needed to understand the place of problems within a strength based re-authoring approach. It will not attempt to deny the existence of problems but will endeavour to develop practice that allows designers to glean needed insights without allowing the oppressive energy of problem saturated stories to dominate the co-design process. NT's approach of "externalising the problem" may be helpful in achieving this balance, as challenges can still be heard without reinforcing the participants' identity as problem owner. Visual tools used within co-design processes may be helpful in externalising the problem with participants; external representations such as sketches, maps and prototypes could allow participants to explore and reinterpret the problem in a realm physically outside themselves. New perspective would therefore be shaped in "conversation" between participants and the external representations (Schön, 1983) in a similar process as the "two chair" dialogue within NT (Young & Brown, 1994).

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the value an Appreciative Co-design approach could bring in shifting problem oriented stories and supporting participants through a process of social transformation. In future research I intend to develop Appreciative Co-design in practice, draw on the experiences of other designers and continue to borrow insights from neighbouring practices. I hope that contributions made will give back to these practices and I welcome researchers to join the conversation. In offering this agenda it is not my intention to discredit design's well-established problem solving approaches but merely highlight that as designers we know more about solving problems than nurturing narratives that give life to living systems. As our practice begins to engage with the social architecture directly this is an essential skill to develop. In other practices strength-based re-authoring approaches have created conditions for more meaningful and motivating engagement, let's see what they can bring to Social Design.

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