Play-able: using play to realise the intent of social design

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ABSTRACT

Design – by its relational nature of connecting people, places and things – is an intrinsically social practice. However, the marked shift from prioritising commercial design objectives to creating constructive opportunities for collective engagement and social change has resulted in the emergence of social design. Viewed as a discursive moment and not a discipline, social design embraces different design approaches and participatory processes; as such, it is not defined by a pre-determined design process or outcome, but rather by its intent of engendering responsibility and social behaviour change. Within this context then, the aim of the paper is to reflect on the way in which play enables designers to realise the intent of their social design practice. To address the aim, the paper first contextualises social design and presents a conceptual framework of play. Secondly, the paper presents South African vignettes of the city and the higher-education design classroom to highlight the practical value play affords design to aid the understanding of social problems in general and advancing agency and ownership for sustained social behaviour change, in particular.

Keywords: social design, play, design activism, design education, social responsibility, South Africa.

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Introduction

The publication of Victor Papanek's *Design for the real world* during the 1970s is widely recognised in design discourse as being the turning point towards a social agenda for design owing to Papanek's (1974) critical position against industrial design's consumerist approach at the time of writing. The themes of ecological sustainability, inclusion and social justice that permeated his polemical text remain relevant within a contemporary context, albeit the discipline's broader concept of a product. The nature of designed products has evolved from traditional form-giving practices that were characteristic of the industrial age, and that catered for a European and North American middle-class audience, towards design products taking the form of systems and services that cater to a more inclusive, global audience. Ilpo Koskinen (2016:18) argues that 'as design has moved on to immaterial forms, social design has changed shape ... Its specificity lies in its definition of social as its material rather than in the objects it ends up creating'. The nature of a design product therefore rests on the motivation and intent of a design project, which may range broadly from form-giving to meaning-making.

In line with Jacques Rancière's (2004) aesthetic philosophy of 'a redistribution of the sensible' – where sensible essentially refers to a field of perception – social design affords its participants a sense-making opportunity to rethink the relationships amongst people as well as the relationships between people and institutions (both private and public) to support social behaviour change. As such, the paper aims to illustrate the potential of design interventions to create the conditions for people to motivate themselves. The social behaviour change witnessed in Bogota, Colombia, under the governance of mayor Antanas Mockus from 1995, serves as a case(study)-in-point. In a somewhat unprecedented move, Mockus turned to creative interventions to engage the citizens of Bogota, who were despondent and felt powerless amidst the widespread drug trafficking, violence and crime. For example, Mockus used mimes to address driver's and pedestrian's disregard for road crossing rules (Sommer 2014:15); this intervention, together with his other civic antics, contributed to a reduction in road fatalities by more than 50 per cent during his two terms in office. In the words of Mockus (cited by Cabellero 2004),

> [i]nitially 20 professional mimes shadowed pedestrians ... A pedestrian running across the road would be tracked by a mime who mocked his every move. Mimes also poked fun at reckless drivers. The program was so popular that another 400 people were trained as mimes.

This Colombian example aligns with the underpinning ethos of social design because it did not prioritise a material outcome but focused specifically on the intent to engender responsibility and social behaviour change. Cited as a cultural agent by Doris Sommer (2014), Mockus's example is presented alongside other political initiatives that highlight the role of aesthetic experience and the utility of the arts. Notably, Albanian president Edi Rama's call to paint the facades of block-housing in bright colours in the city of Tirana (when he was the mayor) had a transformative effect on its citizens; the use of colour literally brightened the locals' outlook of their city and consequently fostered lawful commercial practices. Hence, what can be taken from these examples[1] is the value of using creativity, playfulness and even humour to reframe social issues and, in turn, give meaning to them.

In keeping with this stance, the paper brings play into conversation with social design within a South African context. The South African context is significant because the country is plagued with socio-political challenges, which have not abated in the post-apartheid regime; the Covid-19 pandemic has also exacerbated issues such as social inequality, unemployment, and access to education. To this end, the paper continues by presenting a conceptual framework of social design and play, respectively. Subsequently, the practical application of play in two instances of social design, namely a public design intervention in the city and a design project in a higher-education classroom, are offered to facilitate a discussion on the value of play to realise the intent of social design.

Conceptual framework

Both social design and play are similar in that there is variance in their definitions, and the articulation of their processes and outcomes are not fixed in literature. What follows then is not an exhaustive literature review, but the key ideas of each concept as they relate to the specific research context at hand.

Positioning social design within contemporary design practice

Owing to the breadth of contemporary design practices, it is useful to map social design, relative to other design practices, to understand and articulate its basic premise. For this purpose, I draw on Ezio Manzini's (2015:40) visualisation, which he terms a design mode map. As seen in Figure 1, the design mode map comprises two axes. The horizontal axis represents the continuum of design outputs, which range from the design of single entities on the left to the design of systems on the

right; to put it simply, it is the "what" of design. More specifically the different expectations of design outcomes on each end are based on different intents, namely problem-solving and sense-making. These intents are not fixed so this axis must be understood as a continuum on which design practice can oscillate freely.

Perpendicular is the vertical axis, which denotes "who" is carrying out the design action. Concurrent with the changing nature of the design product, there has been a diffusion of design. What this means is that design is not practiced exclusively by design experts – those who are professionally trained in design skills – but also by non-professional designers who have increasing access to digital design technology, and whose efforts have been spurred on by popular discourse on design thinking over the past two decades (Brown 2009, Martin 2009, Pink 2006). However, as a popular problem-solving methodology within business and innovation contexts, design thinking becomes prescriptive and does not sufficiently acknowledge the nuances of abductive thinking that professional or expert designers employ in their practice. Nonetheless, the "who" of design on the vertical axis denotes different design actors and their competence, ranging from diffuse designers at the bottom to expert designers at the top. In practice, the ratio of these key actors is contingent on the nature of each project.

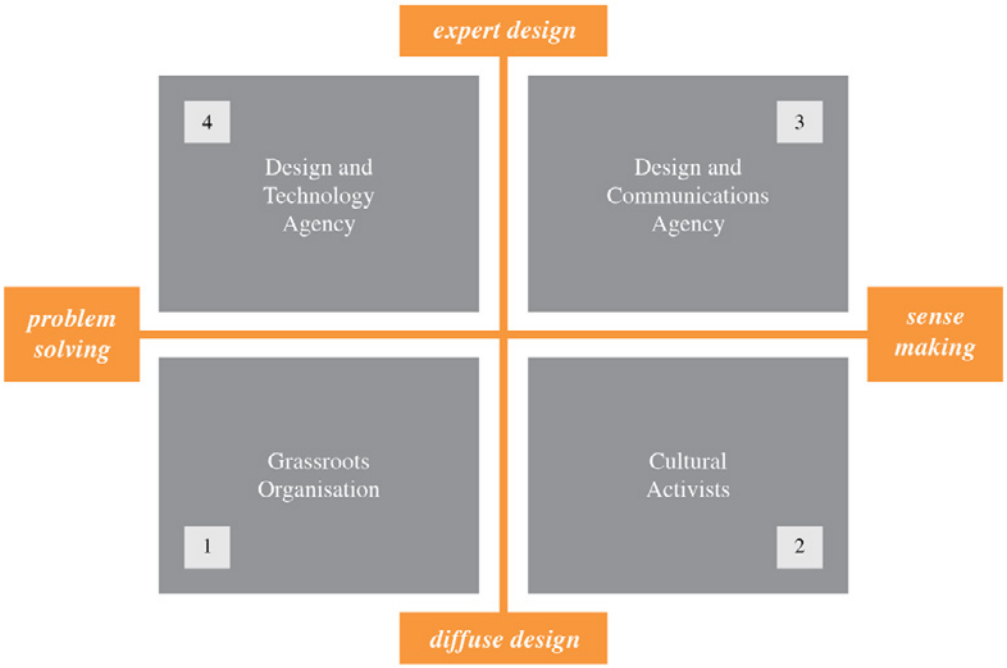

FIGURE Nº 1

Design mode map (adapted from Manzini 2015).

Following from the abovementioned variables, the design mode map is divided into four overarching quadrants. Each quadrant denotes the dominant capacities for design actions and the related design actors. Owing to the complexity or wicked nature of design problems, in practice the four quadrants are not static as they appear on the two-dimensional map. The robust nature of co-design and other participatory design methods that inform all four modes of design on the map attest to the general socially responsible turn in design. In this vein, Markussen (2017:161) recognises that the concept of social design becomes murky because 'the concept of "social design" is often interchanged with terms such as "social entrepreneurship" and "social innovation"'. As such, Markussen (2017) distances himself from Manzini's broad articulation of social design, which is conflated with social innovation and mimics Papanek's earlier approach to social design, namely to target market failures of product design by innovating new social forms. Markussen (2017) also critiques Manzini's (2015:65) approach as being class-determined because of his assertion that social design is for those who cannot afford the cost of design.

Similarly, while I find Manzini's design mode map useful to position the widening domain of design practices in terms of the design actors and their related design actions, I draw on the following criteria identified by Markussen (2017) to unpack a more critical understanding of social design: aim/intent; *modus operandi*; social value; locus of innovation; and scale of effect. These criteria facilitate a conceptualisation of social design that is distinct from market-driven practices such as innovation and entrepreneurship.

The aim of social design is not to remedy or provide concrete solutions for change, but rather for designers to mobilise a group of people to converge towards a common goal; often, the audience is a marginalised or disadvantaged group who are given a platform to have their voices heard. In this way, the intent to engender responsibility is to realise social behaviour change. By and large, social design favours an open and participatory process, which brings together diffuse designers and relevant resources. The diffuse designers work towards social, rather than commercial ends. They operate as cultural activists: 'people who are interested in cultural activities … who set up venues to promote their areas of interest and to create occasions for exhibiting, presenting and exchanging experiences and debating' (Manzini 2015:41-42). Instances of design activism, which are referred to as design interventions, illustrate how such infrastructure for engagement is generated. Design interventions 'are experimental in nature and therefore cannot be described in terms of a pre-given form but only in terms of their intention; they comprise material and immaterial design objects – as prompts, probes and

provocations – that are assembled in an urban environment in a particular way and for a given time to address a specific issue or cause of concern to citizens' (Cassim 2019:1). Examples of tactical urban interventions range from being unsanctioned to sanctioned, and include tactics such as guerrilla gardening, informal bike parking, yarn bombing, park(ing) day, and open streets to name a few (Lydon & Garcia 2015).

Like the *modus operandi* of social design, its social value, locus of innovation and the scale of effect are also criteria that are contingent on context. The social value of social design operates on a small scale; it is concentrated on a redistribution of resources and inter-personal relationships, and not concentrated on the independent gains of any person or institution. As another criterion, the locus of innovation denotes where the iterative design process unfolds and where the diffuse and expert designers collaborate. Since social design operates on a micro-scale, the scope is inward-looking and therefore the scale of effect is qualitative as opposed to quantitative as it seldom reaches beyond the limited frame of operation (that is, a particular public or community).

From the above conceptualisation, it follows that social design occupies the bottom-right quadrant of the design mode map where the primary focus is on sense-making by a group of people, comprising both expert and diffuse designers. Based on this positioning, social design's intent exists in a so-called problem space rather than the solution space. What this means is that the diffuse actors who operate in a problem space are involved primarily in the cognitive act of framing design problems as opposed to decision making, which is generally in aid of offering immediate, pragmatic design solutions (Dorst 2011,2015). According to Kolko (2010), framing is 'the act of purposefully shifting the normative frame, often temporarily or in multiple directions at once, in order to see things from a new perspective'.

The term "sense-making", which has its roots in organisation theory, is understood quite literally as the way in which people make sense of and give meaning to their experiences; it is a collaborative, social process where 'human situations are progressively clarified' through reflection, shared awareness and understanding (Weick 1995:11). Similarly, social design is a collaborative practice that does not happen in isolation but depends on the involvement of diffuse designers. While the expert designers often initiate the sense-making process through prompts and provocations, the diffuse designers are encouraged to draw on their own design thinking skills and capabilities. Since sense-making is a reflective process that is driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick 1995:17), experimentation and

speculative prototyping are more commonplace design actions in this mode. Hence, for purposes of this paper, social design is positioned as a sense-making process of constructing meaning in which expert designers and diffuse designers operate within the realms of meaning and language, and where design actions are informed primarily by social and cultural motivations.

The concept of play as a sense-making strategy

The study of play is very broad because its key ideas emanate from an array of disciplinary perspectives, including but not restricted to education, biology, psychology, and sociology. The understanding of what constitutes play is therefore so varied and ambiguous that the general consensus among contemporary play theorists is that it is easier to identify play than it is to define it. Brian Sutton-Smith's (2008) seminal contribution to the discourse on play supports this viewpoint; in particular, Sutton-Smith's (1997) seven rhetorics of play are aimed at understanding different narratives that scholars use to discuss children's play. For example, the rhetoric of play as progress is informed by the belief that children learn and adapt through play. This typology is used to show how play takes on many forms and presupposes different functions. Likewise, the activity of play is not only associated with games. In terms of its representational content, play is categorised into different types such as biblioplay, free play, creative play and dramatic play.

Owing to play's weak ontological base, this section does not aim to define play, but unpacks the behaviour or act of playing in culture by drawing on the play theory of Thomas Henricks. Henricks (2011) asserts that play is not merely a fun and/or developmental activity. Informed by a sociological lens, Henricks's (2011:225) search is to understand play 'as part of a more general theory of human relationships'. Henricks acknowledges the significance of play as a social and cultural phenomenon of human life and therefore does not relegate adult play in favour of child's play. This cultural perspective on play is reminiscent of Dutch anthropologist Johan Huizinga's stance in his seminal text, *Homo Ludens* (1949). By exploring different social manifestations of play – such as the role of play in law, science, war, philosophy and art – Huizinga (1949:2) argues that play has a 'profoundly aesthetic quality' and is a necessary (but not exclusive) condition for the generation of culture.

Notwithstanding the same cultural focus on play, Henricks departs from Huizinga's thinking in that his conception of play is not separate from reality. Unlike Huizinga's (1949) claim that play exists in a suspended reality, or what he terms "a magic circle", Henricks believes that play is inextricably linked to the real world. The approach that Henricks (2011) takes to understand play is by distinguishing it

from three other forms of human activity, namely ritual, *communitas* (shared commitment/participation in social/cultural forms), and work. He describes the organisation of these four behaviour patterns as pathways that facilitate the formation of one's experience of being in the world. Moreover, he asserts that play is premised on different human relationships, and it is through these relationships that people have an opportunity to attain self-realisation and become themselves (Henricks 2014).

Henricks arrives at this viewpoint by applying an ascending-descending framework to categorise the four forms of human activity. This framework explains the relationships between the so-called higher systems of reality and lower systems of reality. In the words of Henricks (1980:29), the two different levels refer to 'the issue of dominance or power between systems – to the relative ability of one system to modify or transform the processes of another system'. Higher systems denote broader, more general systems such as culture (a symbolic plane of existence), and the natural world (a physical plane of existence). In contrast, the lower system refers to more specialised or narrow system that operates on the level of an individual (that is, the self). Depending on the instance of human behaviour, both the higher and lower systems offer resources or inputs that inform a human's resulting behaviour. For example: culture offers publicly accessible ideas; the body facilitates physical capabilities, and the psyche guides one's personal orientations (Henricks 2015a:1398-1399). In any context of human behaviour, the related resources may either serve as constraints for action or offer forms of enablement towards new possibilities.

Based on the framework, shown in Figure 2, Henricks demonstrates that play is characterised by an ascending order of meaning construction or sense-making. To put it simply, in the act of play, the individual is more dominant than the patterns of culture in which the individual exists. Ritual acts, in contrast, are not characterised by subjective involvement owing to their descending order of meaning (Henricks 1980:29). Likewise, the motives for each activity also differ. Play's motives are consummatory, denoting that the 'motives for interaction [among human actors] are located within the activity itself', whereas ritual's motives are considered instrumental or obligating because they are driven by purposes that are external to the interaction. Moreover, the different movements of meaning making and motives highlight another distinction about the types of human actions and experiences, namely transformative and conformative. Play facilitates transformative experiences, because physically it is an active mode of experience; symbolically, play's contestive nature of interaction that has the potential to disrupt the patterns of other systems. Ritual, on the other hand, renders the human actors as passive

and speaks to them conforming to patterns and practices of behaviour. Play has a testing and teasing underpinning that's not evident in ritual practice.

Following from the above conceptualisation of play, it is evident that the act of play does not exist in isolation; it is a culturally and socially circumscribed action, characterised by an ascending pattern of meaning construction that 'encourage[s] people to open up the possibilities of meaning both within [play] events and beyond [play] events' (Henricks 2015a:1431). Play, which begins with sense-making at the level of the individual's activity in the real world, supports Henricks's theory that play offers humans a means of understanding the world. By uncovering an individual's capabilities (as well as limitations) within the world, play enables a frame or window that allows people to determine their capacity to act in the world. In the words of Henricks (2009:15), play offers a place for 'the conjuring of possibility'.

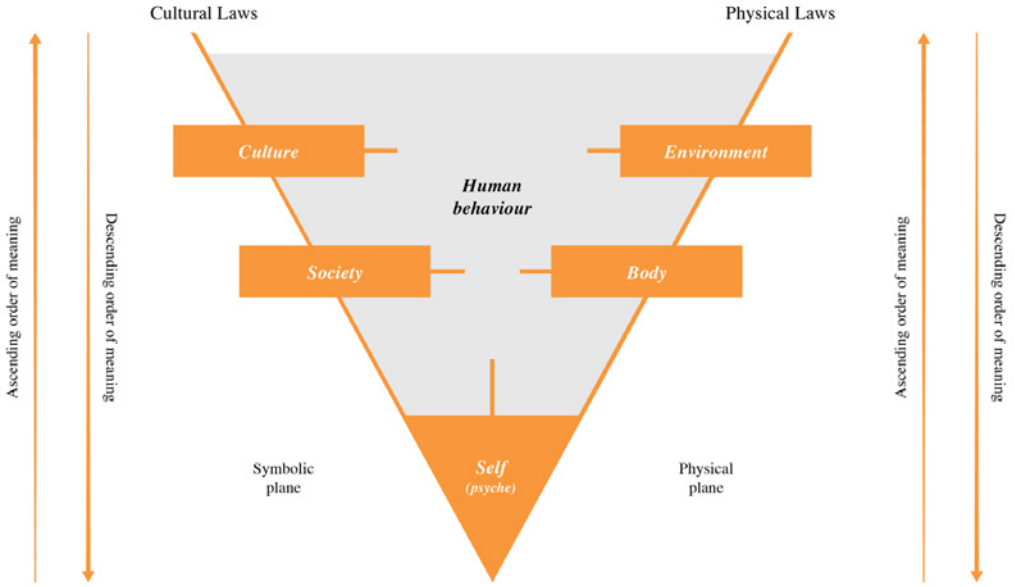

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Fields of relationships as frames of human behaviour (adapted from Henricks 2015a).

Despite the significance of the individual, play is not only about subjective experience. The relational and inter-relational underpinning of play signifies that people do not act alone in play. Play is shaped by collective concerns and interests; it aligns actions and orientations of players. Accordingly, Henricks (2015b:277) recalls Huizinga's sentiment that 'play marks the character of societies just as much as it marks individuals'.

Bringing social design examples into play

Following from the theoretical conceptions of social design and play, two shared attributes emerge. Firstly, the act of designing and the act of playing facilitate processes of sense-making; they enable spaces for autonomous action and aspirations. Secondly, the respective particularities of social design and play are contingent on a specific context as well as resources that are mobilised to realise such action and aspirations. Hence, the vignettes that follow make visible the practical convergence of social design and play at a micro-scale in two South African contexts, namely the city and the classroom.

The city

City Walk Saturdays, a 2015 place-making initiative in Cape Town that used open streets as a tactic, was an initiative by a local NGO to give citizens an opportunity to participate and contribute directly to the inner city in an attempt to see it as their own space. The NGO called on designers and citizens alike to bring or create their own games/interventions one Saturday per month to disrupt public space and thereby invite a more diverse group of people into the inner city. Essentially, the city walk initiative encouraged the support of diffuse designers; it did this by encouraging a do-it-yourself ethos, which in turn aimed at shifting the focus of the inner city as a place of consumption to a place of participation. For example, the spike of xenophobic attacks amongst African immigrant entrepreneurs in 2015 inspired one of the city walk interventions titled '100 African Reads', which focused on reading African literature out loud in public spaces (as seen in Figure 3). This design intervention, as its name suggests, used biblio-play as a tactic to share stories. The intention of the literature created a disruptive experience through a celebration of different literary and, by extension, cultural identities.

The following observation from a City Walk participant makes visible the intent of the intervention to facilitate reflection and hence the subsequent opportunity to frame new narratives:

> *There were close to a 100 performers who were reading African literature from around the continent ... some just sitting on a park bench reading, they were all dressed up ... Or a lot of them carrying umbrellas... they were very distinctive and they made people pause and question, like what are you doing ... It's such a mixed bag in terms of who lives in Cape Town and with all the xeno[phobia], the debate around that narrative that's surfacing ... It just seemed super relevant. How is this city responding to, not only the issues of local citizenry but the massive immigrant population that lives within the city. And indeed the country.*

FIGURE **Nº 3**

100 African Reads, City Walk Saturdays, Cape Town 2015 (photograph by author).

Another City Walk intervention that garnered a lot of interest from passer-by's (some who weren't even aware of the City Walk initiative) was a giant game of sidewalk Scrabble, as seen in Figure 4. As an observer myself, the words that emerged with the laying of the lettered-tiles were just as curious as the non-verbal engagement of the players. The unspoken words, such as former South African presidents' names "Mandela" and "Zuma", reflected leadership and governance; and "gamble" and "liveable" hinted at topical social issues. The words that were playing out in the emergent crossword were relevant to the South African zeitgeist. As such, the act of playing suggested that the players were framing national issues in a collective manner.

It was also noteworthy how a couple of self-appointed game referees surfaced, and collective governance was instituted. Players engaged in a convivial manner with the referees for the duration of the game, and they were open to doing things in new ways and in unfamiliar groups. The play experience elicited the following response from a participant:

> *there's something so powerful about playing with one another ... I genuinely think that, you know, when you play you kind of, you take something off ... You kind of step outside of your social framework that you kind of have put upon yourself or that the world has put upon you. Or the social construct. And I find that to be very powerful ...*

FIGURE Nº 4

Giant Scrabble, City Walk Saturdays, Cape Town 2015 (photograph by author).

In both the City Walk examples, the audience comprised an active audience from different races and across different age groups. In light of this, the context of the intervention, the Company's Garden, was also significant. The strong colonial legacy of the space – it was first established by the Dutch East India Company to grow vegetables for settlers – was disrupted through play because there was no evidence of marginalisation; everyone had equal access to the interventions. Essentially, everyone's behaviour, that is their decision to participate or not, was self-motivated.

The classroom

As part of the BA Information Design curriculum at the University of Pretoria, final year students are introduced to different types of play before undertaking a social design project that requires them to develop a toolkit for children to grapple with topical social issues through play-based, experiential learning, information design deliverables. Even though the outcome of this project includes tangible design products, for purposes of this paper, the focus is on the value that play afforded students during the iterative design process.

The four-week long project is initiated with a half-day play workshop, facilitated by two play professionals. The interactive nature of the workshop gave students an

opportunity to play with games and activities that spanned different categories; mastery play and creative play being a couple of examples. Moreover, the students' experience of each type of play was supplemented with theoretical information about the developmental appropriateness for children of different ages. It quickly became evident to me, as one of the design educators, that the professionals modelling the act of play in the classroom signalled to the students that they too could let loose within an otherwise formal classroom context.

In 2019, the Information Design project brief (Cassim & van der Merwe) asked students to select a design principle as a point of departure, and then decide on a real-life application. For example, one group of students used the principle of pattern and repetition for their toolkit, titled *Imagimotion*. This toolkit was designed with the intent to encourage emotional awareness and empathy in children and, as such, the respective toolkit activities were designed to help children understand their own emotions and perspectives, as well as those of others, by using non-competitive play and imagination games.

The social nature of the project necessitated that students engage with their end-users from the conceptualisation phase to the production of their final toolkit prototype.[2] Figure 5 shows a prototyping session for a creative play activity from the *Imagimotion* toolkit. Here the children were asked to draw emotive prompts using student-designed stencils on a printed outline of a face. The value of the students' playful engagement with the target audience is exemplified in the following reflection by a student:

> *The user testing was also something that I was surprised by during the project. By interacting with our possible end users, even with a product that was not complete, I was able to learn so much about what children actually want and need.*

To date, from my experience as a design educator, I am acutely aware that students tend to show reluctance and don't always take heed to feedback during a design project if it means more work for them. Hence, it was significant to recognise students being more open to constructive criticism from the end-users and educators alike. As I've noted previously about this social design project (Cassim 2020:530),

> *play assisted the students to break the ice more easily with their end-users, especially during prototyping sessions. The rapport that was established made it easier for the end-users to contribute towards framing the design problem at hand. In turn, this allowed students to move from their own (often assumed) frames of reference. Students are generally moulded by ideas and ideologies that stem from their own contexts and cultures, so it was significant to see during class consultations that students tried not to impose their own views and beliefs on their designs.*

FIGURE **Nº 5**

Imagimotion, Prototyping session, Pretoria 2019 (photograph by Information Design students).

Outside the classroom setting, playing enabled the students to put a human-centered design ethos into action with their end-users because their process was not overtly methodologically-driven; the ongoing engagements between the students took on an open and fun approach. Moreover, the interaction amongst the students in each group resulted in sustained dialogic encounters amongst the group members. In turn, each member of the group was motivated to play their part and contribute towards a positive group dynamic:

> *Was hard to let go and be yourself in the group [in previous group projects] but [playing together] was actually conducive to getting to know team members better.*

Discussion and conclusion

Firstly, as the vignettes above reveal, play facilitated sense-making opportunities for the participants in an individual and/or a collective capacity. Both examples pragmatically substantiate social design's nature of operating in a problem space where awareness and engagement serve as precursors to action. The different social design instances favoured participants' presence and their interpersonal engagement in an immediate context. The classroom vignette, for example, provides evidence that the capacity to act changes in play. The students who were initially sceptical of prototyping with children learnt very quickly that they couldn't make sense of the project brief from a detached position and could not carry out their subsequent design actions unless the distance between them and their end-users was bridged. Here, play served as a metaphorical bridge to bring the students and

their end-users together. The mandatory inclusion of play in the design process also created the conditions to motivate the students to look closer because it disrupted the students' habitual design behaviour; for instance, students were pleasantly surprised by how much they learnt about children's needs and likes before they could begin designing for them. In contrast to the curriculum-related context, however, it was not possible to determine whether the sensemaking processes in the city extended beyond the playing instance because of the ephemeral nature of public design interventions. Hence, to investigate the long-term value and impact of play on social behaviour change, longitudinal design studies are suggested as an area of further research.[3]

Secondly, in both examples, the participants involved did not operate as passive observers. Instead, play facilitated common lines of action and imagination. Firstly, play brought people who may not have met and/or engaged previously, as well as giving oft-relegated groups – such as non-city inhabitants, and children – an opportunity to loosen up in a short space of time and subsequently participate freely in social design interventions. Based on the context of engagements and the autonomy that the respective participants displayed in their interactions, it became evident that play generated the conditions for people to motivate themselves; their behaviour stemmed from their person, which is characteristic of an ascending order of meaning. To echo Henricks (2015:247), the play activities facilitated 'moments of personal revelation'.

Despite participants' autonomy, playing together also gave participants an opportunity to welcome information from different subjects in non-judgemental and open ways. The sentiments from participants in both vignettes reveal similar experiences, especially with regard to how play improved the quality of their participation. For example, the Information Design students were open to the children's' ideas and suggestions and did not disregard them. Hence, play facilitated a shift in intention in the students from one of knowing to one of learning, which allowed more room for the students to grow personally and professionally. Likewise, in the game of Scrabble, the collaborative process of sensemaking enabled trust, which was evident in the way that players willingly took instructions from the self-appointed leaders. Overall, both examples make visible Sicart's (2014) understanding that play is underpinned by a disruptive attitude in that it allows boundaries to be pushed via chance and imagination.

Thirdly, the play spaces created became '"symbolic realities," conceptually bounded worlds whose principles the participants accept, if only for the moment of that encounter' (Henricks 2015a:1382). In each example, the symbolic reality that

emerged served as figurative frames to allow participants to engage more fully with each other in the given space and also provided participants with amicable ways of confronting the social issue at hand. Gathering from my first-hand observations in the city and the classroom, it was apparent that figurative frames function like works of fiction and storytelling: their value lies in the fact that they bear a strong resemblance to the real-world, but without imposing normative expectations on the audience. Participants could therefore imagine more freely together. In turn, the symbolic realities prompted an immediate and visceral, aesthetic experience for the participants. For instance, not only were the city walkers and students committed to participating, but they visibly expressed eagerness in the play space. The "redistribution" of the participants' senses focused on a process of re-envisioning, which also highlights a shift in focus from what is to what is becoming. Hence, the vignettes demonstrate how play has the potential to aid social design in enabling people's imagination and nurturing the capacity to act towards what may be. Towards social design's ends, play's contribution in shaping that which does not yet exist resonates with Nelson and Stolterman's (2012) argument of a "design way", namely design as a culture and form of social inquiry.

In conclusion, albeit the evidence presented in this paper, which establishes an association between play and social design's intent of sensemaking, further research is necessary to investigate whether a causal relationship, if any, exists between play and sense-making. However, given Schiller's (1954:80) avowal that the impulse or desire to play is innate in humans, and 'man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays', it stands to reason that social designers should harness their innate sense of play to understand their own behaviour and in turn, to work collectively towards the common good.

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Notes

1. Albeit the two examples mentioned in this paper being top-down, government-sanctioned initiatives, Sommer (2014) also covers grassroots/bottom-up approaches in her book, *The work of art in the world.*

2. All the ethical procedures and admin necessitated by the higher education institution were facilitated by the design educators in this regard.

3. Within product design as well as design management theory and practice, there are established systems in place to assess design's impact and economic contribution (the triple-bottom line is one such framework). However, with regard to the social impact of design see Niedderer, Clune and Ludden (2018) for 'theories and practices of designing for change'.

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