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Styling the Future. A philosophical approach to design and scenarios

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Abstract

Since the end of the 1980s – the Decade of Style (Mort, 1996) – the value of style in design has fallen. Recent times (Whicher et al., 2015) see a focus on style as a sign of design's immaturity, while a more mature design should be attending to process, strategy and policy creation. Design Thinking has been enjoying its success in the same spirit, where it is championed (Brown, 2008; Martin, 2009; Neumeier, 2009) as a way of taking design away from its early stage as 'mere' styling, towards the more thoughtful, serious matters of business.

The philosopher Gilles Deleuze is of a different mind however. 'Style,' he writes (1995, p.31), 'amounts to innovation.' For us this engages not only a rethinking of design practice in particular, but also a reconsideration of the guiding principles of scenario planning. Deleuze's thought entails the opportunity for styling to be an act that participates in driving all creativity towards making a successful future impact (Flynn & Chatman, 2004; Cox, 2005). A philosophical disruption of current design and scenarios orthodoxies offers a way of considering that style has a key role in the production of the future.

Here, then, we will investigate the creative, even innovative, opportunities that emerge from a reworking of the value of style that comes from a critique of Design Thinking, a perspective on future-thinking (especially scenario planning (e.g. Schwartz, 1991; Li, 2014; Ramírez & Selin, 2014), but also some work from organisation and management studies (e.g. Tsoukas, 2005a, 2005b)), and an encounter with philosophy (particularly the work of Deleuze & Guattari (1984, 1987, 1994). We will highlight the affective capacities of style – in design and scenarios, both as creative constructing of futures – by way of creatively accessing uncertainty, complexity and indeterminacy in the production of strategic maps for living (both individuals and organisations).

Keywords

Deleuze; design; future; innovation; scenarios; style

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'style amounts to innovation'

Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*

'Immediate experience requires the insertion of the future in the

crannies of the present'

Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*

Introduction

Ever since the Design Council produced its review of the value of style in the

Product Design of the 1980s (Vickers, 1991) style has become a dormant

discourse in design. The tendency has been to valorise design not because it

styles but rather for its ability to go beyond things (Findeli and Bousbaci,

2005), into intangibles such as services and experiences (Fulton Suri, 2003),

until all that matters is its meaning (Krippendorf, 2006; Verganti, 2009), its

criticality (Dunne and Raby, 2002; Malpass, 2013) or its thinking (Brown,

2009; Martin, 2009; Neumeier, 2009).[1] As design has infiltrated areas that were otherwise out of its bounds – most notably 'the boardroom', as has been demanded especially by those championing 'design thinking' (Brown, 2009; Martin, 2009; Neumeier, 2009) – it has thereby fought to justify itself, its seriousness, as more than 'mere prettification' or the production of 'skin jobs': phrases rife in our experience of design consultancy. In fact, design-as-styling is seen as an early stage of design's development with design-as-strategy as its highest form. This is most clearly represented in the Danish Design Ladder (2013). More tellingly the same ladder has been named the 'Design Maturity Ladder' by the Sharing Experiences Europe project – funded by the European Commission to 'integrate design into innovation policies and programmes' (Whicher et al., 2015, p. 28) – to evaluate the way that design is used in a number of different European regions. The authors write:

> Using the survey data, companies [in Austria, Denmark, Estonia, France, Ireland and Sweden] were categorised into four stages of design maturity, depending on how they use design: 1) no or little design, 2) design as styling, 3) design as process, and 4) design as strategy. The higher a company is ranked on the Design Maturity Ladder, the greater strategic importance is attributed to design and the greater the return [on investment] (Whicher et al., 2015, p.11).

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[1] 'Design thinking' has been critiqued well by Lucy Kimbell (2011, 2012) and Cameron Tonkinwise (2011), as well as by the designer Kevin McCullagh (2010a, 2010b). Ulla Johansson-Sköldberg et al. (2013) provide a very good critical overview.

The discourse of *immaturity* of design as styling is evident here, especially insofar as this discourse is key to further design's importance: which is also an important element to the arguments propounded for the value of 'design thinking' (Brown, 2009; Martin, 2009; Neumeier, 2009). This position is compounded in work calling itself (variously) design-inspired (Utterback, 2006), design-led (Kyffin and Gardien, 2009) and design-driven (Verganti, 2009) innovation: which highlight as valuable some of the same aspects of design that 'design thinking' does: its user-centric research methods, creative ways of generating and deploying insights from research observations, and the ways that designers can decode and recode meanings that they interpret.[2]

Vickers's (1991) review of design in the 1980s, the 'Decade of Style',[3] appears something of a final flourish. There seems to us to be an opportunity here: what if style was not merely an early stage in design's progress to more mature forms? With some of the founders of 'design thinking' highlighting its death (Nussbaum, 2011), we wonder whether – in the spirit of disruptive innovation (Christensen, 1997): finding an old concept and revivifying it to construct a new market – style can find a way back into design to drive it in a new, innovative direction. We wonder whether style can be considered

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[2] Andy Dong (2014) examines very well these different ways of considering design's relationship with innovation.

[3] This phrase is widely used to describe the 1980s, but Frank Mort (1996) deals with it fully.

differently such that the sensational and aesthetic[4] aspects of its nature can be experienced as strategic and innovative. Style, as philosopher Gilles Deleuze says in one of the epigrams at the head of this paper (1995, p. 131), amounts to innovation. The essay in which these few words sit is called 'Mediators', and in it Deleuze is considering what it might take to position philosophers, any thinkers, as mediators: pitched into the middle of things, helping creativity flow, directing and redirecting the forces that produce the new into ways that open up their possibilities, rather than close them down and 'domesticate' them. We will look at this essay again below, but it is worth highlighting how this relates to some futures thinking. Futures researcher and educator Marcus Bussey (2013) in 'Foresight Work as Bridge Building: Poetry, Presence and Beyond' talks about futures practitioners as 'bridge-builders' making paths to connect contextualised communities to build 'optimal' presents by engaging the future:

> The construction of such pathways, as bridges, to the future is a work
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> of hands, heads and hearts and thus requires craft, theoretical
>
> knowledge and love. This amalgam comes together and is expressed
>
> as a form of practical imagination in which the futurist holds a creative

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[4] We are reminded of the etymology of 'aesthetic' from the Greek *aisthetikos*: 'of or for perception by the senses' (Liddell and Scott, 1889). Which aligns it with our use of the language of 'affect'. In philosophy affect has a value coming from 17th Century philosopher Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* (1996). Part III, definition three states: 'By affect I understand affections [or 'modifications'] of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained' (Spinoza, 1996, p.70). An aesthetics of style, then, can be one that takes account of its affects: the sensitive, sensual and sensed reactions to designed things (things that are also strategies, stories and spaces of course). We note our particular use of the word 'affect' in this article.

space that enables clients to see things, as the poet Wallace Stevens said, 'beyond us, yet ourselves' (Bussey, 2013, p. 103).

Bussey then goes on to reference Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 109), aligning himself to their validation of the power of the nonphilosopher in philosophy. The whole passage – from which Bussey (2013, p. 104) takes 'acephalic, aphasic, or illiterate' – is worth quoting in more detail, as it articulates some of the issues Bussey, and we, are highlighting. Deleuze and Guattari write:

> Artaud said: write *for* illiterates – speak for aphasics, think for acephalics. But what does this 'for' mean? It is not 'for their benefit . . .', or even 'in their place . . .'. It is before [*devant*]. It is a question of becoming. The thinker is not acephalic, aphasic, or even illiterate, but becomes so. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 109; original emphasis. Translation modified)

We give the French *devant* for 'before' as it encompasses senses of the past, standing next to, and in front of/ahead. The thinker becoming acephalic, and so on, does not identify with this as a type, but opens a way that mediates or bridges between the ontological possibilities that both positions express. Bussey, Deleuze and Guattari place ontological singularity in a flow: and the singularities of 'past', 'present' and 'future' are no different to thinkers and acephalics. While Bussey does not discuss style in 'Foresight Work as Bridge

Building: Poetry, Presence and Beyond', his paper is replete with it: from reflections on his own style ('piece-meal'), to the use of poetic references to construct a way of thinking and doing foresight. When he 'sees through borrowed eyes' as a way of recontextualising a perspective on present and future, Bussey thinks the future *for* those who might not, but he stops short of theorising the way for them to embark on their own becoming. This is not necessarily a shortcoming in his quirky article, as how he uses this foray into Deleuze and Guattari, and poetry and song, is worthy enough. He writes:

> To remember myself and to acknowledge my borrowed eyes somehow liberates me from practice while allowing me to be present to it as practitioner. In this remembering past, present and future converge. It is in this confluence that I situate my teaching, often telling students that futures thinking draws on foresight, anticipation and emergence; is located in the present; leverages the best of tradition while working from the present to foster optimal plural futures for all (Bussey, 2013, p. 106).

In a way Bussey's position here is one deep within the tradition of scenario planning. Peter Schwartz's *The Art of the Long View* sets out an array of directions for thinking and resources for thinking where uncertainty, the ontological expression of the 'future' for business, can be engaged. From the very opening of the text, Schwartz's vision betrays two lines of thinking that run through discourses on foresight and design/'design thinking': the

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methodological, sequential arrangement of procedures that deliver clear, meaningful outcomes; and the experience of becoming something different as a necessary, uncertain prerequisite to change 'mindset', which therefore enables the methodological processes to deliver insight that can address the future.

When he writes in the author's note, an opening to the future of scenario thinking, 'each of us responds, not to the world but to the image of the world' (Schwartz, 1991, p. 53), the entire book is staged by a reflection on a pre-historic monument called Avebury, 10 miles outside of Stonehenge. The image he paints for us of this place is pictured on the cover by French artist Paul Malecarnet who painted the three stones of the monument, making the middle stone in the foreground 'a portal to an unexpected bright sky', the centre stone acting as an off-kilter *trompe l'oeil*. The design, the style, the scene, the scenario proposed by our pre-historic antecedents is a visual experience acting as the opening to 'becoming' a thinker of scenarios, who by definition is disturbed, disrupted, dislocated by the flow of past, present and future.

> I have looked at this painting many times, starting with its first exhibition, in 1988, by the Francis Kyle gallery, and now in my home. I cannot see it without thinking of the stones as three separate messages from the past, three separate views of possible futures. There, in the middle, is a future of hope, one which we might not have dared see unless we looked for it. We do not expect to see it; indeed,

we do not understand it. But it changes our world. (Schwartz, 1991, p. ii)

It is the scenario thinker's experience of the domestic and the Uncanny (a concept of Freud's (1955) to which we return below) – *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, the *heimlich* as the homely, and the *unheimlich* the strange, the unexpected – an experience of the unfamiliar future given by the design of this image.[5] Throughout the book, Schwartz's own adventure in ideas, the writer offers a set of instrumental procedures while alluding to experiences of a very different style which can actually change 'mindset', where the scenario thinker is in the process of becoming something else: a computer designer, a Soviet economist, a teenager, an environmental activist (Schwartz, 1991, p. 65). More radically, in reference to a video exhibition seen by Pierre Wack in the Japanese science city of Tsukuba, Schwartz not only imagines seeing through a different eye, as Bussey asks us to do, but becomes animal: experiencing the world in the style of the non-human. He writes:

> Through a 'bee's eye' you saw hundreds of tiny images. As a frog, you
> saw movement across your field of vision; the eye had no depth
> perception. Most interesting was the horse. Since the eyes are
> mounted on the side of a horse's head, the sharpness in the video

[5] As well as Freud's engagement with the psychoanalytic, and Schwartz's with the future, there are also past-oriented uncanny histories. See especially Knittel (2014).

screens was exactly opposite that of a human being (Schwartz, 1991, p. 73)

It would be easy to pass by the implications of this, just to see this as a matter of rhetoric. But what if – and the power of the scenario to change 'mindset' is the 'what if' – this direction to explore the fringes, the edges, and escape the institutional inertia (which Schwartz argues inhibits innovative thinkers), we were to take this rhetoric literally? Schwarz writes: 'at the social and intellectual fringes, thinkers are freer to let their imaginations roam, but are still constrained by a sense of currently reality' (Schwarz, 1991, p. 73). Schwartz is offering an alternative to the systems of scenarios organised around realism and meaning, giving us style as a strategy not an instrument, a way in which to experience the world differently.

Style has value to anyone involved in the future in a variety of material ways. We will highlight just two in this paper. The first involves innovation and style, as encompassed in the quotation from Deleuze used as an epigram to this paper. One of innovation's best definitions (that is, open and amenable to unfolding in multiple contexts, for many different reasons) is that it is the successful implementation of creativity (Flynn and Chatman, 2004; Cox, 2005). This definition has the benefit of addressing front-end practitioners in the creative industries and back-end managers, and the range of mediators, intermediaries, leaders and others that exist between and beyond them. It also is able to contain a future function both in the strategic landscaping of its operations and the speculative scenario planning

of its modal possibilities. We will argue that such strategic mapping, future planning and all-round successful creative impact generation is a matter of style.

The second value relating style and the future revolves around design and strategy as evinced in the other epigram we use, from philosopher and mathematician Alfred North Whitehead's (1961) *Adventures of Ideas*: 'Immediate experience requires the insertion of the future in the crannies of the present' (p. 191).[6] Recent work on the relation between design and the future is of note here: design historian and theorist Victor Margolin's 'Design, The Future and the Human Spririt' (2007), philosopher of design Tony Fry's (2009) *Design Futuring*; Design Fictions (see Hales, 2013); and the critical designers Tony Dunne and Fiona Raby's *Speculative Everything* (2013). While it is not the purpose of this piece to provide in-depth critiques of these texts, it is worth noting that they are part of recent attempts to highlight design's future function. For us design is an act of the production of present experience by materialising the future: this is how we read Whitehead's phrase (see also Brassett and Marenko, 2015). In so doing ours is a position closer to work on 'speculative hardware', where modal conceptualisations are creatively materialised through hacking into the present. It is as if these

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[6] We would like to highlight that the final chapter of this book is called 'Foresight' (pp. 87–99) and provides some of its own foundations for a philosophy and foresight practice that become one another. He writes: 'Philosophy is at once general and concrete, critical and appreciative of direct intuition. It is not – or at least, should not be – a ferocious debate between irritable professors. It is a survey of possibilities and their comparison with actualities' (Whitehead, 1961, p.98). Management professor Haridamos Tsoukas references this work in 'What is Organizational Foresight and How can it be Developed' (2005a).

forms of design pick out their own crannies in the present. So we align

design to the strategic and creative aspects of innovation: strategically

mapping the complex contours of the present and the future, finding the

places in the present where the future might work, and inserting it into the

present as designed things (tangible, purely visual and nontangible things).

We are aware that scenario planning needs positioning here too.

It is the purpose of this paper, then, to encounter the two elements of

style's value to the future as follows: first, we will position one of the

foundational discourses of style in recent cultural history, Dick Hebdige's

seminal (1979) text *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. This is because

Hebdige shows the possibilities for positioning style beyond mere

'prettification', as something that not only expresses material, subjective

stances, but new worlds in which meaning, self and culture can interact.

Second, we will evaluate style in the few texts from scenario planning in

which it is, or might be, an important concept. We will emphasise particularly

the ways in which scenarios also open up new worlds, worlds that are

viewed uncomfortably from today's perspectives, where the possible,

probable or even plausible are styled as 'not quite fitting' (Hebdige, 1979).

Third, we will briefly outline some recent ways of engaging more openly with

style in design, particularly through critiquing 'design thinking'. We will

articulate style as something that disrupts the spaces of our very being, and

as such can force us to rethink the affect not only of style, but also of design,

scenarios and our attitude to the future. Our conclusion will attempt to draw

these thoughts back together and offer ways for pursuing style as innovative

in design, as well as using it to draw out the disruptive uncertainties in scenario planning.

Styles

The etymology of style shows its precedent as the Latin *stylus*: a tool for writing, scraping out a line on a wax tablet. In philosopher Jacques Derrida's *Spurs* (1979) – a short book on style in Nietzsche – Derrida notes the link between style, *stylus* and materiality thus:

> In the question of style there is always the weight or *examen* of some pointed object. At times this object might be only a quill or a *stylus*. But it could just as easily be a stiletto, or even a rapier (Derrida, 1979, p. 37).

Style, Derrida speculates here, takes different shapes – a pen, a dagger – to generate material effects. Style becomes part of a procedure that affects material, forms words, cuts or stabs flesh, as well as an indispensible element in the delivery of a process. For us there is an interesting slippage between style as a thing and as an activity here: at once it is a process with affects, and an outcome of such a process, an effect. From styling comes style. It is particularly important for us to allow for this slippage without seeking to pin it down, to dominate and secure meaning. We would like to emphasise both the affects of styling and the style-effects that are so produced.

Furthermore, the issue of morphogenesis – matter's own tendency to take form – that is inferred in this stylistic slippage will also become a key issue here. We will examine in more detail below this process of forming matter, but here would like simply to highlight, with Derrida, that in style's ambiguity is its possibility of becoming different: as a pen it might 'just prettify', as a dagger it might be more strategically incisive. Or: as a stiletto it might be used impulsively, and as a quill it could sign the fate of millions. There may be more to style than placing it on the second rung of a ladder of maturity might allow. At the very least, style has *affect*.

This is shown especially clearly in Hebdige's (1979) work on meaning, style and subculture, which lays out some essential features of what style *does* – how it affects as part of a plan, even if that plan is unconscious. An influential book within the field of cultural studies, Hebdige's work seeks to examine social change in the UK through the analysing the semiotics of youth culture. For Hebdige styles express complex social, cultural and political discourses, and in so doing can be mobilised strategically to homogenise, subject or subvert. The style of a subculture, for example, is the apparatus whereby a group asserts its dissonant or socially unacceptable identity. Moreover, it creates a new space of the unacceptable. This is a very important point to emphasise here, as we will return to this notion below when encountering some thoughts on scenario planning, especially in terms of the discomfort of the unknown (Ramírez and Selin, 2014) and the modalities of contradiction and surprise (Booth et al., 2009).

For Hebdige style becomes a mobile, supple act of affective defiance

that is manifest through the arrangement of visual signifiers. His account of Punk for example shows how style is the expression of a 'lack of fit' materialised through its practices: hole/t-shirt, spitting/applause, bin-liner/garment, anarchy/order. Punk's style becomes the act of not fitting (Hebdige, 1979, p. 120); it redesigns the things and the spaces important to its positioning through a deliberate disjunction. In this way style is not only a specific array of garments, it *is* the discourse: the systematic arrangement of things, images and practices whose system emerges from the acts of expression themselves, and affects the very bases of its being. The new spaces that this styling produces, generates different lines of style, new narratives that are not grounded by previous and familiar narratives of identity. Punk entails generating a world, styling new lines and borders of subjectivity, new cultures, new modes of sociality. In an evocative passage Hebdige describes what happens when a new world is generated by a youth subculture, how it is populated by subjectivities with different kinds of relationships. He shows how a subculture can

> represent a major dimension in people's lives – an axis erected in the face of the family around which a secret and immaculate identity can be made to cohere – or it can be a slight distraction, a bit of light relief from the monotonous but none the less paramount realities of school, home and work. It can be used as a means of escape, of total detachment from the surrounding terrain, or as a way of fitting back in to it and settling down after a week-end or evening spent letting off

steam (Hebdige, 1979, p. 122).

While the material particularities of the acts of Punk as Hebdige presents them – the styles thought of as personifications of the subculture – may differ across subcultures, and cultures for that matter, his insight relating the forms and content of the expressions with the creation of worlds, or worlds within worlds, remains (even if he did not articulate it in these terms).

The spatial language here is worth highlighting, as it will be a key element of what we will like to say with regard to style and scenarios later. There is a sense in which what Hebdige's punks do through style is to disrupt the spaces in which they exist, carving out new modes according to which they not only generate new meanings but also new possibilities for living. Territorial disruption, what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call 'deterritorialisation' (1984, 1987, 1994), is an effect of style; it is one of the ways in which style is innovation (as we have noted Deleuze saying above), but also an act of generation, not just destruction. To deterritorialise is to undo organisational norms (spatial, material, cultural, political and so on) and allow matter and energy to flow in and out.[7] Its disruption is eminently creative. As a cultural theorist with a stake in 'meaning', then, Hebdige might want to emphasise the coherency of the 'secret and immaculate identity' provide by style. We want to address style as movement and becoming, as

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[7] See Brassett (2013) for a fuller examination of the ways in which this concept, and related ones of 'territorialisation' and 'reterritorialisation' impact thinking about networks of design and innovation.

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creating modes of existing that are fluid not fixed. Style does this by generating affect, disrupting territories of power and control.[8] To fold back into Hebdige's example in the quotation immediately above, style deterritorialises linear narrative and the fixed discourses of school, home, work, family. Style has the power to reinforce dominant discourses, as well as disrupt them of course. In any case, whichever way we take it, style does more than 'prettify'. We turn next to discuss style in scenario planning, to find out how it is viewed and, particularly, where it can be shown to engage with the uncomfortable.

Scenarios, styled

In an article for the *Journal of Futures Studies* Zhan Li (2014) discusses the relationships between sense making and rhetoric in scenario work, in a way that articulates a position on style. Li's argument revolves around a particular definition of rhetoric that follows Jerome Bruner as 'taking a stand' over the interpretation of reality (2001, p. 35; quoted Li, 2014, p. 78).[9] Further, Li locates rhetoric is firmly within the milieu of innovation, so that meaning becomes founded within an authorised discursive system in a world of

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[8] The disruptive, subversive affects of Punk stylistic tropes are still evident. Monika Sklar gives examples in her (2013) *Punk Style* of 'stoning, torture, and killing of youth dubbed emos in Iraq [. . .] Additionally, in Indonesia, individuals adorned in punk style at a punk band's music event were rounded up and jailed, then forced to bathe, cut their hair, change their clothes, and pray [. . .] The international incidents at all levels of severity reinforce the value in the design' (p. 148).

[9] A more traditional definition of rhetoric would follow Aristotle (2005) as the art of persuasion. While there is the possibility of regarding such rhetorical persuasion as affective, and so link with our discussion of style, we would like to side line such a discussion for the moment, with the hope of returning to it another day.

uncertainty and complexity (Brassett, 2013 and 2015). To treat innovation in this way is to steel it against chance and possible disruption by rigidifying its actions around firm, authentic meaning making rhetoric. For Li scenarios not only express a position on the future, but also offer validated options for understanding the future. 'The futurist's goal,' he writes, 'is to effectively intervene and become part of an organization's narrative sensemaking [sic] process – a rhetorical endeavour in the power/knowledge combinations that make up its construction of reality' (Li, 2014, p. 79). While the combination of sense making and control of the real are hinted at here (and at a few other moments in Li's paper), they are not examined at any length. What he delivers is a useful discussion of the rhetorics of scenarios but whose focus on knowledge and meaning renders its gestures towards networks of power and control empty. Stories and narrative need to encounter style, they need to be styled, for the other elements (the authoritative control of meaning, for example) to have impact. Rhetorics without flourish remains vapid.

As we saw with the Punk example from Hebdige above, style does have an important ontological and political function. That is, it can produce affects: personal, cultural and social; even temporal with its modes of expression rippling through the future as tropes that can be taken up and laid down like rhythms (Deleuze, 1988, p. 123). For us, rhetoric is important because it makes explicit the strategic play of the organisation of matter and energy in order to generate affect. That is, it is part of the constitution of ontologies that also demands a consideration of politics and ethics. Style maps the boundaries and interfaces between organisations and people,

discourses and practices, politics and ontologies, and itself always changes according to the dynamic fluctuations of the boundaries and interactions between all of these.

When considering the affective characteristics of scenarios, then, it is worth taking into account the ontological as well as the epistemological. We shall see others in this conceptual and practice space pursuing these lines of thought. However, Li also gestures towards such a position when he writes: 'scenario work can be thought of as a narrative medium of power, with the scenarios and scenarists being the intermediaries of rivalrous or collaborative networks organized around the future' (2014, p. 85). Li's paper concludes by taking the concepts of 'modal narratives' from Charles Booth, Peter Clark and others into his discussion of sense making and scenarios. For Booth et al. (2009a and 2009b) modal narratives – those that posit the question 'what if…?' – not only subvert the accepted authorities' expressions of the real, but also actively undermine them. Modal narratives 'are most valuable,' Booth et al. write, 'when employed as "surprise machines", highlighting gaps, or contradictions in belief (doxastic) or value (axiological) systems' (2009, p. 124). While scenarios can be used by organisations to delimit the boundaries of the realities they allow their actors to inhabit, they can also be used to disrupt or deterritorialise these organisations. Which is exactly the position we were in when considering subcultural style above. Maybe the acts of styling and of planning scenarios are not too different, when pushed to their surprising extremes.

Styling the future through constructing anti-meaning, punky 'surprise machines', comes about via making a concrete impact upon the conditions of existence of the very organisations and actors – that is, the ontologies – that permeate all networks. Cate Watson's (2009) essay 'Futures Narratives, Possible Worlds, Big Stories: Causal Layered Analysis and the Problems of Youth' makes of future stories another disruptor of accepted discourses. Taking Inayatullah's (1998, 2004) work on Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) as a starting point, Watson also makes reference to many of the modes of thought and philosophers we mention here. For Watson, CLA is useful in order to 'prompt a number of "scenario points" which are intended to disrupt current understandings and the appeal to commonsense through generating visualisations of different worlds' (2009, para 4.3). Her creation of futures will serve to dislocate the ways in which organisational, media or other gatekeepers of discursive authority over the real are making (their actors see) sense. Inayatullah's layering of a number of different styles of critical storytelling – deconstruction, genealogy, distance, alternative pasts and futures, and reordering knowledge (2004, pp. 13 and 14) – Watson explains, benefits an approach to the future that recognises the creative opportunities afforded by accepting the complexities of the present. It appears that where we introduced a particular spin to style via Hebdige (disruptive and deterritorialising) and thereby recognising that it has other possibilities (supportive and territorialising, or homogenising and overpowering), there is in this approach to scenarios a sense in which these aspects of disruptive uncovering are key to its nature. This is worth focussing upon a little more

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philosophically, as it brings to the fore some key concepts that we are starting to mobilise here regarding style and the future, especially as these can revolve around the quotation from Whitehead we use at the head of this paper: 'immediate existence requires the insertion of the future in the crannies of the present' (1961, p.191).

As we noted above, for us design delivers such an insertion; and it delivers it with style. We would say here, too, that from the work we have been encountering on scenarios they appear to be able to do the same. We have, then, the intriguing possibility that design participates in a styling of the present by viewing, capturing and reworking the future. The spatial language we have already seen used in relation to Punk style, as acts of disruption and recreation of new possibilities of existence, are here in Whitehead's phrase. Our immediate existence, then, is the future's becoming present, a present that is designed, styled. Proof of the possibilities of the future is in the experiences that we have, with style, in the present. This is what the present is: its becoming future. Philosopher Brian Massumi takes this further, when discussing the arts as semblance and event (2011), disrupting any commonplace understanding of linear cause and effect in prioritising the process about which events occur as present. 'A thing felt,' Massumi writes as if glossing on Whitehead's 'immediate existence',

is fringed by an expanding thought-pool of potential that shades off in all directions. It's like a drop in the pool of life making ripples that

expand infinitely around. William James spoke in those terms. He said

experience comes in 'drops' (Massumi, 2011, p. 51).

The thing about process philosophies – such as Whitehead's and James's,

for example – is that the immanence of things emerging with the times and

spaces of their being-as-becoming, makes simplistic notions of causality

redundant. So much so that Massumi can even speak of 'future causes' (De

Boever et al, 2012), and to great effect in terms of designing. He explains:

> The designer is a helpmate to emergence. He can put the pieces in
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> place, moving through a linear series of steps progressing from the
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> past of abstract conception to a present on the brink. But the passing
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> of threshold to invention depends on the potentialization of the
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> elements presently in place as a function of their future (De Boever et
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> al., 2012, p. 26).

Here Massumi emphasises that the future acts as an 'attractor' to present

events, directing the emergence of the present – especially through its

concretisation in things – towards it, so much so that it (the future) can be

seen as a cause. 'A technical invention,' says Massumi explaining the

position of philosopher Gilbert Simondon on this, 'does not have a historical

cause [. . .] Invention is less about cause than it is about a self-conditioning

emergence' (De Boever et al., 2012, p. 26). In another interview, Massumi

reinforces this concept of the future-attractor conditioning the present thus:

'The future has a kind of felt presence, an affective presence, as an attractor. Because each tendency tends toward a certain kind of outcome. It is attracted by its own end' (Massumi and Kim, 2009, p. 8). As we have stated, designing expresses Whitehead's 'insertion of the future in the crannies of the present', it identifies future attractors and draws out the emergent properties of matter to allow it (matter) to drift as that future allows. The future is the tendency of the present to reach it, and has that effect because it is inserted right there, in the present. This is how we would like to think of design, as the process by which the future gets inserted in the present, thus participating in the present's becoming. Which, we remember, is what Whitehead calls 'immediate experience': our very experience is this, designed, styled. We would like to show how scenarios express themselves at a number of points in these processes, and to do this we need to draw upon the spatial concepts used already.

Along with the philosopher of science Michel Serres (1982), we see any strategy having first to map the complexities of the space in which it is going to operate.[10] Any strategic plan, therefore, needs to consider its planes of operation, before it then considers how to deploy, martial and manage its dynamic and energetic resources. We have already encountered a disruptive style creating new ontological spaces. We have seen, too, how scenarios access spaces of the future through layering complex stories to serve as

[10] Tsoukas (2005b) also makes reference to Serres's work in discussing organisational approaches to uncertainty and complexity.

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'surprise machines', jolting organisations from their norms in order to attend to the possible. If we also collide these thoughts with those about design as 'inserting the future in the crannies of the present' in the creation of 'immediate existence', we get somewhere quite intriguing. The sense of strategy outlined by the Prussian general von Clausewitz in his influential *On War* (2013) is that it is the military art of fulfilling policy directives, the current discussion makes of strategy something less linear. So that the plans for present and future action, designed to achieve policy goals themselves already constructed as desired futures, are at once spatial and temporal, and when understood in terms of *style as disruption and deterritorialisation*, must simultaneously be creating new times and spaces. Strategic plans account for the style of the spaces for their deployment at the same time as they construct them.[11] It seems to us that any strategic planning wholly or partly expressed through scenarios is already participating in such activities: expressing, designing, mapping, bringing together future and present, deploying and managing: in short, styling.

What might some of the outcomes of this way of thinking be to those seeking to draw together future and present, to style the future now? First, such an activity is no mere simplistic concatenation of prior or present events, in order to draw causal links from then to now to possible, probable, plausible, prophesiable, or even predictable futures. CLA itself offers a

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[11] With each instantiation of strategy thereby deforming the space-time in which it operates, it is no wonder that 'no plan ever survives first contact with the enemy', as the other famous Prussian field marshal von Moltke said (Hughes, 1993, pp.45–7), for the moment of engagement deforms the space and time of action for which any strategy was produced.

complexity of thought and practice to a world of complexity, for example, but can tend to coalesce its system around the epistemological. Whereas the discussions we have been mobilising of the affective nature of the relations between present and future(s), via design and style, is markedly ontological.[12] For us, a design-focused critical reappraising of style can offer opportunities to consider affective, multi-layered and over-folded, future-causing maps of the ways in which beings can become. While CLA provides a route into complexity, and sometimes chaos, its tendency to systematise or even totalise around acts of meaning making seems to us problematic. Scenario planning can suffer the same problem, tethering to meaning making or epistemological concerns, but in the best work can point to uncomfortable, disruptive, surprising or other creative moments where operational reliance upon linear causality or sense making is inadequate. The best work in design and scenario planning is deliberately styled, where we are pushed into new realms of being through surprise, the subversive or the disruptive. Where styling does not simply *mean*, but *is* in many possible ways. Beyond the epistemological, scenarios create fissures in the normal where entire ontological volumes can spring.

Rafael Ramírez and Cynthia Selin's 'Plausibility and Probability in Scenario Planning' (2014) is one example of such work. (Booth et al.'s work,

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[12] It should be remarked, however, that Bussey has used CLA to create curricula, coining the term Causal Layered Pedagogy (CLP) and drawing much on the works of Deleuze and Guattari. For Bussey the Ontological can replace Inayatullah's Myth/Metaphor layer (see: Bussey, 2009). See also Arie Rip (2009) for a discussion of technological innovation, networks and ontology, as future-oriented processes, where Whitehead and Deleuze are some of the process philosophers used to ground the paper's argument.

already mentioned, is another.) Having established that an approach

valorising plausibility not probability is more fruitful in scenario planning,[13]

they then complexify such a simplistic dichotomisation further. They write:

'Scenario building works well when it departs from the comfortable familiarity

of established plausibility and/or the settling security of purported

probabilities to venture into the discomfort of inquiring into the unknown'

(Ramírez and Selin, 2014, p. 66). The evocative term 'discomfort' brings to

mind the ontological and spatial concepts that Freud encounters in his essay

'The "Uncanny"' (1955). The uncanny – *das unheimlich* in German, the

unhomely – is a sense of horror that those experience who find themselves

somewhere uncomfortable, insecure, uncertain. This is about more than what

we know or do not know. And where it *is*, the 'unknown' has an affect upon

us that is more than merely describing an epistemological reality. The story

told of the future can be discomfiting: a little glimpse, now, of what could be,

knocks us out of the familiar, cosy, *heimlich* space. We are disrupted and

deterritorialised by a very highly styled act. Ramírez and Selin continue in

much the same vein: 'we propose that the scenarios which might better help

to guide action in post-normal uncertainty are those considered highly

implausible and uncomfortable – those existing outside mental models and

framings that contest their relevance and validity' (Ramírez and Selin, 2014, p.

67). While they do tether such uncomfortable creativity to sense making at

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[13] See also Wilkinson, et al., (2014) where the same points are articulated. Wilkinson et al.'s
is an interesting paper advocating mixed methods when approaching complex and uncertain
spaces. It accepts some of the claims made by 'design thinking' as to the value of design to
sectors outside its traditional realm of influence.

the end of their paper, the gesture to a critical disruption of the norm through a type of stylistic flourish, a creative inversion of dominant discourses into minoritarian affective innovations (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986) – scenarios becoming punk, so to speak – is laudable. We shall return to this below.

Designing and Styling

There is a well-wrought paper by the philosopher and design theorist Cameron Tonkinwise (2011) that takes particular care to unpack style in a way that will allow for its 'unrepression' in design. As if having been relegated to the early stages of design's maturity (Whicher et al., 2015), it lurks ready to cause discomfort. He is masterful in taking apart the discourses and practices of 'design thinking': showing how, by removing any aspect of style from designing, its proponents are able to focus upon design's strategic function, as this function is more easily transferrable to other, primarily business, contexts. It is style as a carrier of aesthetic that interests Tonkinwise here. And his aesthetics start by following familiar philosophical patterns – mainly Kantian – that place it as an activity of making judgements about taste. Tethering his argument to the work of Bourdieu (though with mention of Heidegger through Heidegger's followers), Tonkinwise exposes the age-old connection between style and taste that seems not to be so widely developed these days. So his reintegration of style into 'design thinking' aims to foreground the acts of judgement that it ('design thinking') entails, and so the ethical responsibility that must accrue from such acts. Even though it disavows the actual in its suppression of aesthetics, 'design

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thinking' must nevertheless be held responsible for its material acts

Tonkinwise argues, and so he develops a way to reinsert style into 'design

thinking' because for him it will reconnect 'design thinking' to its

responsibility. This is a worthy approach, we think, improved further by his

foregrounding of the ontological in an otherwise epistemological sphere.

Thought ontologically, style becomes more about how the styled can impact

the conditions, and opportunities, for us to exist: an important ethical and

political issue. And when Tonkinwise couches style's ontology in terms such

as 'feasibility' and 'unfeasibility', we are placed back into our discussion of

scenarios above: regarding the relations between discomfort and disruption,

the known and the certain.

Style can announce the ways in which different immediate

experiences (tangible or intangible designed things) come together to form

communities: by mediating, bridging differences and highlighting the ways in

which different immediate experiences impact each other (as we saw with

Bussey and Deleuze above). Doing this can have different effects: style can

provide a path to uniformity, homogeneity and order, as habitual practices

form around these styled things become attractors in an otherwise chaotic

system. But when allied to the disruptive, jarring of the unfeasible, the

uncanny of the deterritorialised, style can develop innovative opportunities

for future development. Like Booth et al.'s 'surprise machines' (2009) and

Ramírez and Selin's scenarios of discomfort (2014), we find style here

working to influence innovative impact through the undermining of the normal.

For Tonkinwise this is a sort of 'return of the repressed'; to this we would add

something more active. It is here, then, that we would like to say a few words about how this relates to our depiction of innovation.

At the outset of this paper we took some time to relate to and unpack the quotation from philosopher Gilles Deleuze that we use epigrammatically: 'style is innovation' (1995, p.131). In this essay Deleuze engages with concerns about the future of thought, politics and ethics, and considers that philosophers, for example, should regard themselves as intermediaries: always in the middle of actions of thought, participating in creative acts using their own tools (thinking) and material (concepts).[14] While creative practitioners may create the new, this will happen, he argues here (and in Deleuze and Guattari, 1994), through the mediation of creative forces. So he insists that creativity is not found in a particular medium, often at the expense of others (in literature rather than television, for example), but that it is a question of forces mediated. We have a choice, he writes, 'between creative forces [. . .] and domesticating forces' (1995, p. 131). That is, we can access forces that allow for creative expression, or those that demand conformity; or, in terms that we have been using in this paper, our creative acts can be uncanny or cosy, *unheimlich* or domesticating. Where Deleuze's position on creativity comes close to discussions on innovation, is when he takes creativity not to be the point, but as a process of expression of affective forces that carve out a new spaces. The 'newness' happens along

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[14] We should note that for Deleuze – here, and in his final book with Guattari (1994) – regards philosophy as a creative practice: the practice of creating concepts; and that philosophers are as creative as artists and scientists.

the way, as part of a process, a marshalling or riding of forces. Innovation

emerges when such creativity has had a successful impact.[15] Deleuze's way

of explaining this comes through reference to sport. 'All the new sports –

surfing, windsurfing, hang-gliding,' he writes at the opening of this piece,

'take the form of entering into an existing wave. There's no longer an origin

as starting point, but a sort of putting-into-orbit' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 120). It is

the 'existing wave' – the particular forces of creativity (or domestication, of

course), of disruption or homogeneity – that gives the possibilities for

innovative affect. To refer back to terms we have been using here, creativity

is an act of deterritorialisation and this unpicking of the forces and flows that

constitute a space, a territory, can go in a different ways: it can disrupt and

energise, it can 'domesticate' or (to refer to another of Deleuze and Guattari's

concepts) 'reterritorialise'.[16] Which places the creative forces that inform

innovation in the realm of style. Tonkinwise shows that style may not be

merely about aesthetics considered as locating moments for judging taste,

but aesthetics as the creation of spaces of sensation, new experiences that

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[15] Deleuze and Guattari's definition of philosophy (1994) comes very close to that of innovation given by Flynn and Chatman (2004) and Cox (2005), when they emphasise that, 'Philosophy does not consist in knowing and is not inspired by truth. *Rather, it is categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important that determine success or failure*' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, pp.82–3; emphasis added). Philosophy's is determined by the affective impacts of its creative styling, in our terms.

[16] The concept of 'milieu' is important to note here, as it participates in the concepts we are mobilising here. In French the word refers to a space, a medium (as in the material through or according to which something moves), and a being-in-the-middle (Canguilhem, 2001; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). O'Reilly argues (2015) that this is important to consider for design because the designer is always in a milieu: in the middle of a network of flows, materially constituted by these flows, and all of these developing within a spatial context. Though Deleuze does not refer to milieu in the essay we are discussing here, the notion of mediation, being in the middle and confluence of forces fits.

allow for the production of innovative ontological modes. Deleuze's style as innovation does the same thing.

This highlights an issue that cuts through all of the design instantiations and expressions of style, as well as in related discourses: that of *form*. Traditionally – that is, since Aristotle – form is something that is imposed upon matter. Matter is so inert, lifeless, that the only way it can be otherwise is if energy is transferred to it by the lively. This is what Aristotle calls 'hylomorphism' and it has served design (and craft and making, politics and culture) for some thousands of years. But since the turn of the twentieth century with philosophers of 'process' (for example, Bergson, Whitehead), 'hylomorphism' has been heavily criticised: the philosopher Gilbert Simondon does so with some venom (2009; see also Hales, 2015). These vibrant, energetic, process philosophers highlight the forming powers that matter has itself. Matter is not inert but vibrant, vital, animated at different rates of speed and slowness. Any form *emerges* from matter in motion: the process is morphogenetic rather than hylomorphic. This means, for design, that designers do not form matter like some Abrahamic God, but rather participate in its forming, provide conditions under which (as matter energy themselves in various levels of spatial and temporal complexity) they all experience a becoming form of matter, as well as a becoming matter of form. Deleuze's thinker as mediator of creativity is already positioned as such. The scenarist styling in the way we are discussing follows the nooks and crannies of the present (maps the strategic landscape of operations, values, forces, regulations and so on) to see where and how the future might insert itself, as

Whitehead might say; to create the possibilities of experience (individual or organisational). To follow the forming that matter undergoes (to design, or plan scenarios) creates new fissures in the present for the future to be styled anew (Canguilhem, 2001; O'Reilly, 2015). Emergent scenarios are not imposed, godlike, on inert matter, making sense of the real for the ignorant, allowing for knowledge to be imparted or held back. If designing can participate in the forming of matter, with style emerging and the multiplicity of affects it allows along with it, then so can any creative practice: philosophy and scenario planning included.

Tonkinwise in the paper discussed above also mentions form (2011, pp. 7–11), using it to mobilise a point about style (forming) that disrupts the modernist dictum of 'form follows function'. Offering instead 'functionality follows the form of the taste practices of the target market' (2011, p. 8), Tonkinwise gives three examples in which his own aphorism might operate: branding, persona building and education. In all cases the agent delivering the form to matter via style is the designer. Whether this styling is conveyed from the deepest workings of the psyche, expertise or genius of the designer, or translated from special insights into the taste cultures of users/consumers through the expertise or genius of the designer, it remains that the designer remains a local version of God. We, however, would like to knock Tonkinwise's insights in a different direction: where style emerges from matter undergoing its own formation under conditions of multiply complex

interactions between space and time, a multitude of actors, and all other

moments of the combining of matter and energy.[17] Thought this way, style

will have impact on how we consider not only designing and innovating, but

scenario planning too.

Conclusion

Style we have been arguing operates morphogenetically: a point highlighted

particularly well by illustrator Mike Lemanski talking about 'his' style in a

recent issue of *Varoom* (the journal of illustration and image making). He

says: 'for me, my style isn't something I "try" to do, it's more the way I work

and *how it ends up looking*' (Manolessou, 2014, p.30; emphasis added).

Thinking morphogenetically about style has a number of consequences. First,

it relocates the agency of the creative practitioner from something godlike to

something more distributed. Style does not belong to someone to be

imposed upon matter/material, but is something that emerges through a

relationship between things (including forces and energies) under certain

spatio-temporal constraints. This point does have its precedents in the

history of styling as we showed above: from Punks repurposing domestic

items for affect, to futurists accessing other intellectual forces in the layering

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[17] We thank one of our reviewers for bringing to our attention the work of Barbara Dervin, on 'sense-making theory' especially in a context of complexity at the edge of chaos (1998). While her work has much to align with ours here (and with Brassett, 2013 and 2015), as well as with developments in design practice over the last 20 years or so (notably its user-centredness), we find that her focus upon epistemology and the search for a totalising meaning is a large departure. An aspect of this present article is to ask scenario planners and designers to stop making sense, and pay more attention to affect.

of stories about the possible. Second, by doing this style explodes the narratives, stories, plots and scenarios that designing both participates in and generates, scattering their pieces and the control over them across a similarly distributed milieu. In disrupting narratives operating under the 'tyranny of the sign' (Lyotard, 1974), under the demand to generate meaning, style is not only emergent, but can emerge differently each time depending upon the particular spatial configurations of matter/material and the temporal evolution of these in relationship to previous stylings. Styles are not simply layered but clustered and dispersed, and the causes they engage may come from the future. Third, style forces all of us implicated in an emergent creativity to reconsider our relationship with the future (in particular) and time and space (in general). The processes that express styling – where style emerges morphogenetically, distributing agency over this emergence widely, and emphasising the various journeys that each styled thing has taken – have so much more to do with designing, innovating and strategising in general, that they warrant closer inspection. We offer this paper as a moment of such inspection, but as with any creative process thought morphogenetically, we pitch this work neither at the origins of the issue, nor at the end as its last words, but right in the middle. Along with the work already done there is more to do.

There is a famous phrase about style spoken first by Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte du Buffon, marking his acceptance into the French Academy in 1753 for his work on Natural History with a speech entitled 'Discourse on Style': 'style is the man himself' ('*le style est l'homme même*'). This

anthropocentric vision of style seemingly gives subjectivity the position of an all-powerful agent forming inert matter. But there is another possibility announced here. The human emerges from acts of styling, acts of forming of the matter of which it is constituted. We, subjects, are dynamic processes of strategic development that are constantly being designed. That is, styled by the impactful confluence of milieu, actors, events and plans. If 'style is the man himself' it plays a much more important role than if it were a final fluffing of otherwise inactive stuff, a final thought that qualifies quantity. In image making (illustration largely, but including photography and some aspects of graphic design and fine art) for example, style has been aligned with questions of personal expression: the notion of a 'signature style' becomes a designer's Unique Selling Point, just as style is used by companies to give their signature to differentiate their products from others' and to provide continuity in new ranges (Person, et al., 2007). As we noted regarding comments by illustrator Mike Lemanski, above, he does not impose a signature style upon inert matter, hylomorphically, but it emerges from the work. So does he – emerge from the work. Styling is an ontological act: a material, affective act of forming the present through the future and the possibilities for experience that this allows.

Style, then, is not simply an attribute or quality but an array of affects spread across a particular milieu (Deleuze, 1995; Canguilhem, 2001; O'Reilly, 2015), with each affect on its own trajectory and meeting other bodies with their own speeds and slownesses (Spinoza, 1955), and swerving in different directions (Serres, 1982; Hales, 2015). A style may be launched with a

particular spin, but the complex nature of the interplay between the space, the medium through which everything is moving and the vast range of other bodies on their own trajectories criss-crossing it all, will lead to nondeterminable outcomes (Prigogine, 1980; Prigogine and Stengers, 1984; Stengers and Prigogine, 1997). With this relation to nondeterminacy we engage a powerful discourse of innovation – uncertainty, chance and change (for example, Tushman et al., 2004) – as well as some of the most creative aspects of scenario work. As we have seen, scenarios come alive when moving away from plausibility, possibility and probability towards the discomfort of the unknown (Ramírez and Selin, 2014) and the modalities of contradiction and surprise (Booth et al., 2009). Removed from discourses of meaning generation and sense making, it is possible to accentuate the *affective* nature of scenarios, engaging more with how things might be rather than what can be known. This pushes them closer to strategy and more firmly within processes of innovation, it seems to us. And as they come closer to strategy, scenarios become maps of the crannies in which the future can be inserted, allowing us to exist, experience and experiment with style. It remains for us to map the next steps of this work, to consider further research to deal with how it can successfully impact practices of design and scenario planning.

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