#1 SO, WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

»WHAT MATTERS MOST IN A POST SPECTACULAR SETTING IS ACTIVITY AND INTERACTION.«
- JOHN THACKARA

»SO, WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?«

A blackboard has been placed on Southover Street, Brighton for approximately one month. It responds to graffiti stating »Capitalism sucks« with the question »So, what can we do about it?« with chalk provided for people to reply.

The graffiti expresses frustration with the current state of affairs and the question posed on the board creates a space to respond and explore solutions. The intention with this tool was to test the water for how willing people are to engage in a dialogue if they can be anonymous (allowing for varying degrees of engagement either passive or active).

Through continuous photographic documentation and observation we have noticed the responsibility of the board gradually being taken on by the public.

Observations/responses to the board (in chronological order):
A considerable number of people passing by pause to read the board Chalk was refilled by someone other than us.
Coins were dropped into the chalk cup.
Chalk cup went missing and the board got responses anyway.
The board fell over and the next day someone had propped it up.
An inappropriate drawing came up but was scribbled over by someone else.
It hasn't been stolen or removed by the council.

Creating an identity for this tool by using a logo was considered in the design stage. Through discussion it was decided that branding would take away from it being purely public and open for discussion, making it seem like it may be led by an agenda. Since its installation we haven't interfered with the evolving dialogue. The board has now been linked to an online space where people can follow up on the conversation and contribute to its development. Ownership has still not been identified in order to not claim authorship by any one group of people and for it to remain a part of *the commons.*

ANECDOTAL ACCOUNT

Whilst filling up the chalk supply a passer-by asked us if we were responsible for the board and expressed his appreciation of it. He suggested that we install more around the city so that other people had access to the opportunity to express their opinions. He also commented that he enjoys being a passive observer rather actively participating with the tool and regularly stops to read other peoples responses. We have also received informal feedback from other sources that it is being discussed by various groups of people.

REFLECTION

The board has been installed for over one month and there continues to be new responses daily. The content of the responses has been fairly evenly split, between answering the question, and irrelevant comments. The most recent development is that it has begun to serve as a community notice board, with a posting of publicity for a free film screening of 'Permaculture, The Growing Edge' by a local sustainability group.

#2 WHAT FUTURE ARE WE HEADING TOWARDS?

»INSTEAD OF COMMUNICATING MORE EXTENSIVELY, WE SHOULD CONVERSE MORE INTENSIVELY WITH OUR NEIGHBOURS WITHOUT THE HELP OF ANY TECHNOLOGY WHATSOEVER.«
- DAVID ORR

»WHAT FUTURE ARE WE HEADING TOWARDS?«

Three visualisations of the future: one positive, one negative and one business-as-usual scenario were taken into a public area to create a pop-up conversation space about future possibilities. They were posted on a board with the question »What future are we heading towards?« painted on it. The board was installed on a pedestrian crossing hot spot on the northern section of *the level* in Brighton for approximately 2.5 hours.

The visualisations were collages of a view of Brighton which were intentionally polarised to provoke response. Each collage was accompanied by short descriptions divided into nine categories (also used in the tools 3 and 4). The categories are all aspects of daily life and therefore accessible to the majority of people. They are food, water, energy, transport, waste, governance, economy, culture and nature.
The aim in creating this tool was to take conversations to the street to gauge awareness and learn about the different perspectives of people from a variety of backgrounds. The hope was to share ideas and initiate dialogue which might have potential to resonate beyond the initial conversation. Participation was purely voluntary and unsolicited with the board triggering the dialogue that took place. Opportunities to respond to the elicitations through writing and drawing were provided at a table adjacent to the board, where we also stood.

ANECDOTAL ACCOUNT

For the duration of the experiment we were constantly engaged in conversation. However, people seemed reticent to draw their own scenarios, or respond with post-it notes. Many of the people stayed for a significant amount of time (over 10 minutes), were very actively engaged in responding to the question and interested in further contact about the matter. The quality of the conversations was very in-depth and revealed more knowledge and engagement with the subject than we had anticipated. We observed that those who conversed with us were aged approximately 30 years and over. Whilst younger age groups showed some interest in the visuals, but did not engage in conversations.

REFLECTION

The setting up of the space on site, with its informal aesthetic and the novelty of the installation being up for a short period of time may have made it more intriguing for people and therefore encouraged participation. If we had, conversely, looked like an organisation and identified ourselves with official looking banners it may have had a distancing affect on people.

The pop-up workshop seemed successful because of the high volume of interaction and the quality of conversations we had. For us there was a sense of enrichment from the experience. However, we realised that the most valuable information came from the dialogue that took place and that we would need to find more immediate ways of capturing it in the future.

NB. We made a conscious decision not to use video/audio recording as we felt it might create a barrier to involvement. We also decided that covertly documenting sound would not be ethical.

#3 HOW CAN WE TRANSITION TO THE PREFERRED FUTURE SCENARIO?

»… WHATEVER WE DECIDE ABOUT WHERE WE ARE HEADED, WE HUMANS DO NOT HAVE TO ACCEPT OUR FATE PASSIVELY.
WE CAN ACT TO CREATE A DIFFERENT FUTURE FOR OURSELVES –
TO AVERT SPECIFIC PROBLEMS OR CREATE NEW BENEFITS THAT ARE NOT NEW ON THE HORIZON. SCENARIOS HELP US TO UNDERSTAND OUR OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE.«
- EDWARD CORNISH

»HOW CAN WE TRANSITION TO THE PREFERRED FUTURE SCENARIO?«

A set of cards was created to be used as a tool to prompt discussions and reflect on what the future could be. The intention is to use these cards in a public forum as a means to get participants to construct a preferred future and then discuss what action is needed to work our way towards it.

The cards are designed to engage people in an immediate way and are split into suits corresponding to the nine aspects identified above. These categories have been further broken down into sets of key components.

The more tangible aspects were divided into all the existing components, whilst the more abstract aspects were polarised to generate debate. Each card includes a representational illustration supported by key words, to make the concept more visceral. All of the components currently exist and participants are asked to remove those that would not exist in their preferred future. This process is followed by a discussion, initiated in response to the question: »How can we transition towards the constructed scenario?«

Ideally, there would be more than one member of the public interacting with the cards at a time. This would mean that there would be a need for deliberation, in order to come to a common consensus in constructing the future scenario. If there weren't enough people we would join in to create a discussion.

An attempt to trial this in a public space failed due to adverse weather conditions and it had to be tested with acquaintances at the university.

ANECDOTAL ACCOUNT

During the trial participants found that in some cases they could not remove a card completely from the scenario. They felt that if the component represented by the card were to be used in a more responsible manner, it could be remain to create their preferred future. For example, instead of completely removing the *oil* and *capitalism* cards they decided to rotate them by ninety degrees. This decision generated discussion around the matter.

#4 BRIGHTON IN 2030...WHAT COULD IT BE LIKE?

»EQUIPPED WITH A FRESH UNDERSTANDING OF WHY OUR PRESENT SITU-
ATIONS ARE AS THEY ARE WE CAN BETTER DESCRIBE
WHERE WE WANT TO BE.«
- JOHN THACKARA

»BRIGHTON 2030...
WHAT COULD IT BE LIKE?«

A walk through Brighton city centre was designed, as testing for alternative method of conducting a workshop and to see whether primary physical experiences are more engaging than secondary visual images to stimulate conversations. The idea behind this was to involve people in the active participation of imagining and discussing possibilities of the future without our physical presence. The overarching question for this tool was »Brighton in 2030... What could it be like?«

The volunteers were led around the trail (using a map provided) which identified nine locations, each of which corresponded to an envelope. Within each envelope was a card (with current facts and statistics about the nine aspects) to create a foundation of knowledge[1]. These provided a basis to imagine what those aspects might be in the year 2030. Volunteers were asked to note the results of their discussions during the walk.

REFLECTION

Mixed feedback was received: some volunteers stated that the trail was too long and that navigation through the city was unnecessary for considering the question, others enjoyed the sensory nature of the experience and found the ritual of opening the envelopes at each point exciting.

From the notes made by participants it seems that the statistics and facts provided directed conversation and stimulated thinking.

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[1]According to Bloom's taxonomy of learning: Knowledge is the first stage followed by Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation. »At the highest level students are capable of understanding complex problems and collectively addressing them by providing solutions.« [19]