

Artists as Designers of Social Change

7.0 Exploration: On Artists as Designers of Social Change

Key Points

- This module, as with the module with Iain Kerr & Jason Frasca (Emergency Futures Lab), is aimed at exploring how the methodologies of artists and designers can be deployed by leaders seeking to disrupt existing systems and foster necessary radical innovation and a make a better, more beautiful and just system (or world).
- While Emergent Futures Lab wrote a book aimed at helping organizations make radical leaps in imagination, the Design Studio for Social Innovation (Kenneth Bailey and Lori Lobenstine, among others) have written a book aimed at helping us use the perspective and processes of artists to observe and change existing social arrangements in order to create more socially just systems, etc.
- What both approaches have in common is that they intentionally challenge the current focus in design thinking and other frameworks for innovation that are myopically focused on thinking / idea generation. They both propose to start with observation of the existing patterns and the intentional, embodied, re-arranging of those patterns.

But First ... Innovating Emergent Futures Redux with Iain & Jason

Before shifting focus to this week's reading and guests, I thought it could be helpful to revisit the work / contributions of Iain Kerr & Jason Frasca. While the drawings in their text may signal something that seems not-yet-fully-baked (candidly, I am not a fan of them as I find them a bit off-putting in their illegibility), they are both serious scholars and practitioners and I want to make sure have given consideration to their contributions before moving on.

As it turns out, the day after we had our session I was invited to participate in another session with them, which was a bit longer and therefore allowed them time to elaborate on some concepts. They also discussed some key principles that they use to guide their work running their [Emergent Futures Lab](#) at Montclair State University. Listening to them, it struck me that these principles could be quite valuable in other contexts, as well.

Emergent Futures Lab Principles

- **BE FREE** - They make the resources of the lab free for everyone because they believe that charging stifles creativity. In an ideal world, they want someone to try something 40 times; and they recognize that if they charge for materials and access to the lab then students and other creatives will allow themselves only a few attempts. Questions for you: In what ways is your organization set up to support experimentation (not a few attempts, but making over and over again - as many as 40 times)? How might you remove financial (or other barriers) to this sort of culture of experimentation?
- **POLICY OF 'YES'** - They say yes to anything / anyone who walks through the door or reaches out to them. They know that creativity will go farther the more they collaborate with others and enable joint experimentation. Questions for you: To what extent is your organization receptive to what (or who) walks through the door (or reaches out via email more likely) and to saying yes to engagement? What would enable you to move in this direction?
- **EMPOWERED** - They want the students to feel they own the lab - that they are catalyzers and facilitators of the space. They do this through a few conventions / agreements: (1) Students can use the space 24 hours a day; (2) They are asked to volunteer to steward the space; (3) Anyone who agrees to volunteer is automatically on a rotation to earn money by working on community projects that come in. Question for you: Through what conventions / agreements might your organization empower everyone to act, make, invite, connect?
- **OPEN** - Iain and Jason got rid of their offices (actually turned them into communal meeting spaces). They sit in the lab among all the students all day long and are continually present. They also ask students to call them by their first names. Likewise, the students serve as peer coaches to each other and if students are working

in a lab when a class is getting ready to start they aren't kicked out--instead they are introduced and continue to work while class is going on. Question for you: How might you create community and remove hierarchy through the way you use both IRL space and online technologies such that there is a sense of doors open to the possibility of ongoing conversation and engagement.

- **INFINITE** - *Students have ongoing and lifelong access to the lab. They can keep coming by after they graduate. They can even keep using the space if they withdraw from the university. They have created a community with no end. Question for you: How might you have a similar sense of creating a covenant with people, whereby they have the possibility to engage and be part of your community even when projects end?*

BTW, the word 'covenant' is one I love. I highly recommend this opinion piece--[How Covenants Make Us](#)--by David Brooks if you have not read it.

How did flight emerge? What are feathers good for?

As part of the workshop, Iain and Jason did a slide deck presentation on how flight in birds emerged. If you don't know (and I didn't), a leading theory at the moment is that dinosaurs had feathers. At first they had only short feathers filled with pigment to make them appealing to the opposite sex. But later it is theorized that they began to grow longer feathers and over time these longer feathers proved to be useful (for instance to keep their eggs warm and for climbing trees). These long feathers on their legs were not used for flying; however, as dinosaurs sought ways to get down from the trees they could now climb, they eventually experimented and discovered the capacity to glide down with the use of their feathers. In brief, flying was an unintended possibility of having some long feathers on your legs. [Here's an article I found that explains this, if you want to know more about this](#)

So one question you might ask yourself: As you discover patterns you are no longer interested in, how nimble are you (is your team / org) to follow the unintended possibilities or affordances of things you already have? Or to flex (i.e. block and probe)?

Why is this important? Because to create new worlds and not simply make incremental improvements to sustain existing (harmful / dysfunctional) worlds, we need to know how to make both differences of degree (quantitative) and differences of kind (qualitative). For the latter - for radical, disruptive change that leads to new worlds - you need to let

go of the world you know and you need a process that is collective, ecological (attuned to the environment), engaged, experimental, and embodied.

Shifting Purpose & Focus: From Ideas to Social Arrangements

As we have been discussing for a few weeks now, a key premise of this program is that the methods and practices of artists are valuable for those interested in progressive leadership (or change-making and world-building). Building on the work with Iain Kerr and Jason Frasca, we will dive into another text, produced by the Design Studio for Social Intervention, that argues against the ideate-plan-make model and makes the case for an alternative process, based in the methodologies of artists and designers.

Here is a passage that opens a Nonprofit Quarterly article by DS4SI, describing the aims of *Ideas Arrangements Effects*

We believe that creating new effects—ones that make a society more just and enjoyable—calls for sensing, questioning, intervening in, and reimagining our existing arrangements. Simply put, we see rearranging the social as a practical and powerful way to create social change. And we want those of us who care about social justice to see ourselves as potential designers of this world, rather than simply as participants in a world we didn't create or consent to. Instead of constantly reacting to the latest injustice, we want activists to have the tools and time to imagine and enact a new world.

The process we examined with Iain and Jason focused on pattern recognition, blocking, probing; pattern recognition, blocking, probing; pattern recognition, blocking, probing--with the goal of ending up in a more radical or innovative place with something material that shifts us out of our present logic / frame / world / patterns of thought and action and that hints at, exists in relationship to, and potentially contributes to the making of a new logic / frame / world / pattern of thought and action.

Although kindred in many ways, DS4SI is proposing a slightly different approach - for one, because their work is aimed at social interventions (read: social justice work). It is grounded in the premise that ideas exist within social arrangements, which in turn produce effects. If we want different effects, we need to focus on changing social arrangements (rather than ideas).

The quintessential example they use is a the setup of chairs in a classroom (a social arrangement).

They write on p. 18 of *Ideas Arrangements Effects*:

When we see chairs in straight rows facing forward, we believe the teacher is the head of the class and that knowledge flows in one direction—from the teacher to the students. In response to this, many workshop facilitators and adult-ed teachers rearrange the chairs into a circle, with the idea being that knowledge is distributed across the participants and could emerge from any place within the circle. The rows are one expression of ideas about how learning happens; the circle is another. The effects that rows or circles of chairs have on learning are important, but they are not the point here. The point is that the arrangement produces effects.

The emphasis in Ideas Arrangements Effects is on recognizing social arrangements and exploring their present effects and the possible different effects if we were to intervene in them. DS4SI is not alone in doing this work. There are many artists who define themselves as "socially engaged" practitioners; and some of the most enduring and catalytic projects and institutions to emerge from the creative place-keeping and place-making movements fit this category, as well. For more on this type of work, more generally, I recommend two organizations: Springboard for the Arts in Minneapolis and A Blade of Grass in New York City. I have included some links to resources on their website below. And before these organizations there are community-based organizations that have done this work for decades (if not longer).

IAE makes an important, new contribution to this body of work. As Iain and Jason emphasize in their work, as well, art is one way of entering or engaging or enabling the possibilities of new worlds. However, in both cases, the work that emerges quite often challenges traditional orthodox conceptions of beauty or excellence (as reified in fine / high art worlds). As we expand out aesthetic values to accommodate new works of art we expand our capacity to hold space for aberrant beauty (for worlds that are foreign and therefore potentially off-putting, but ultimately necessary for human development and societal progress).

For more on the aesthetics of social change, I highly recommend Animating Democracy's body of work called Attributes of Excellence in Art for Social Change. I have included a link below in the additional resources list.

Next Steps

In advance of Tuesday's session you have two assignments:

1. Read the book *Ideas, Arrangements and Effects: Systems Design and Social Justice*, which you should have purchased for this class. OR, if you are feeling tapped and would like to read a shorter summary of the key ideas in the book, [here is a link to a great Nonprofit Quarterly article that does that](#). The book itself is a quick read and the visuals are great; but the article will be sufficient for this week.
2. Read this article on, [Peaceful Protests Outside Supreme Court Justice's Homes is Good](#). (This article was selected for our Tuesday session by Kenneth Bailey before the Supreme Court came down with its ruling on *Roe v Wade*, btw. It feels all the more relevant at the moment.) Here is a paragraph introducing the op-ed:

Centrist and conservative commentators are saying the recent pro-abortion rights protests [outside the houses of conservative Supreme Court justices](#) have crossed a line. These are mobs of harassers who have breached the acceptable parameters of protest, critics contend. But such arguments rest in large part on the myth of an apolitical judiciary. Looked at another way, the protests are salutary rather than destructive, bringing something to bear upon the court that by design it has been always been shielded from: democratic energy.

This article will be used as a case for the session on Tuesday as we seek to examine the relationship between ideas, arrangements, and effects and the power of changing social arrangements. If anyone has any concerns about engaging with this article or topic in class, please reach out to me.

- [Website for the design studio for social intervention](#)
- [Creative People Power](#), a Pamphlet from Springboard for the Arts
- The [website](#) of A Blade of Grass and in particular its [films](#) and [magazine](#).
- Americans for the Arts [Aesthetic Perspectives](#).

7.1 — In Community — Ideas Arrangements Effects with Design Studio for Social Intervention

In this hands-on virtual workshop, you will be introduced to the principals and practices underpinning the book *Ideas Arrangements Effects* by the Design Studio for Social Intervention, represented by Kenneth Bailey and Lori Lobenstine. The workshop will include:

- A short overview of IAE

- Mapping IAE working with the assigned case / article
- An opportunity to debrief

Framing this session, our facilitators Kenneth Bailey and Lori Lobenstine write:

What will it take to imagine and create more just and vibrant communities? How could - and should - members of the creative community be part of that change?

During this critical time when COVID-19 and the Movement for Black Lives are combining to challenge so many arrangements of the “old normal,” we need to get busy imagining - and building - a new, more just and joyful world through the intersection of systems design and social justice.

Preparing for our Session

Please bring / prepare the following for Tuesday's session with Kenneth and Lori—

- Read the book *Ideas Arrangements Effects: Systems Design and Social Justice* by Design Studio for Social Intervention OR if you are feeling pressed for time you may read this [article in the Nonprofit Quarterly](#), which is a great summary of the key ideas of the book.
- To prepare for the session, please also read the article assigned on [peaceful protests outside the homes of Supreme Court Justices](#). Paper and pen

About our Speakers

Guests Kenneth Bailey and Lori Lobenstine of the Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4SI), who co-authored the book *Innovating Ideas Arrangements Effects* will join us this week. You can read more about Kenneth and Lori below.

Who is Kenneth Bailey?

Kenneth Bailey is the co-founder of the Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4SI). His interests focus on the research and development of design tools for marginalized communities to address complex social issues. With over three decades of experience in community practice, Bailey brings a unique perspective on the ethics of design in relation to community engagement, the arts and cultural action. Projects he has co-produced at ds4si include Action Lab (2012- present), Public Kitchen (2011-present), Social Emergency Response Center (2017-present), People's

Redevelopment Authority (2018), and inPUBLIC (2019-present). Bailey was recently a Visiting Scholar in collaboration with University of Tasmania and also a founding member of Theatrum Mundi NYC with Richard Sennett. His new book (co-authored with DS4SI) is entitled “Ideas—Arrangements—Effects: Systems Design and Social Justice” (Minor Compositions, 2020). He received his MFA in Public Action from Bennington College in 2021.

Who is Lori Lobenstine?

Lori Lobenstine is the Program Design Lead and Co-Founder of the Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4SI). At DS4SI she has helped design and lead such interventions as Public Kitchen and Social Emergency Response Center (SERC), as well as civic engagement projects including GoBoston 2030, Upham’s Corner Arts & Innovation District and the speculative People’s Redevelopment Authority. Her consulting practice includes national facilitation work around diversity, equity, and design in the fields of public health, education and urban planning. Her writings include “Spatial Justice: A Frame for Reclaiming our Rights to Be, Thrive, Express and Connect” (available at <http://ds4si.org>) and DS4SI’s new book “Ideas—Arrangements—Effects: Systems Design and Social Justice” (Minor Compositions, 2020).

7.2 Portfolio: Social Arrangements (Sensation, Intervention, Imagination)

Inspired by Ideas Arrangements Effects and the session with DS4SI, I have created an assignment with a different approach for working with your Matter of Concern. Before you delve into the assignment, however, I would like you to read this brief blog post by Robert Ransick (MCAD VP of Academic Affairs) who is also a conceptual artist by training. In [Enough with Problem Solving. Let's Start Creating](#) Ransick makes the case for what artists, as distinct from designers, contribute to the processes of change-making and building better worlds.

To illustrate this distinction, Ransick includes a graphic inspired by the work of author and management consultant Robert Fritz, who describes problem solving as taking

action to make something go away (the problem), and creating as taking action to have something come into being (the creation).

On Your Own (or Work Together?) ...

Building on the case work we did in Tuesday's session, I am assigning a second article to inspire some thinking on how success and value are defined in your organization and how this relates to social arrangements and their effects.

Step 1

The Quarterly Report as Social Arrangement (Read)

Read the article by Steve Denning, [The Dumbest Idea in the World: Maximizing Shareholder Value](#) After I read this article I got into a conversation with Robert Ransick (mentioned above) about the "social arrangement" of the Quarterly Report that has the effect of tuning shareholders, leaders, and entire organizations to actions that will raise short-term quarterly returns rather than to longer term purposes and returns (including social, cultural, and environmental returns). Over time, it also shifts what we believe our purpose to be (strong quarterly reports and happy shareholders rather than customer value, for instance). If we eliminated quarterly reporting and shifted to reporting over much longer horizons (2-5 years, for instance) it would automatically enable investment in those areas that, by necessity, need time to deliver their returns (whether social, cultural, environmental, or economic). It would also encourage patient capital.

Step 2

Make the Case for Intervening in a Social Arrangement in Your Org (Text, Audio, or Video file uploaded to Canvas)

With this article and example as a point of inspiration, now consider "profits" and "value" and "success" in your organization and see if you can likewise identify one or more "social arrangements" that tend to shift your focus away from purpose and your nominal goals and have you trying to deliver on a different kind of success that man, in fact, be at odds with the work you are doing in the world. Address these 5 questions:

1. What is the social arrangement you have identified?
2. What are its effects (how does it cause people to act)?
3. How do those effects skew ideas (thoughts) about your purpose, value, metrics of success?

4. How might you alter this social arrangement?
5. How might this alteration change effects (actions) and eventually ideas (thoughts)?

You are welcome to submit a short video, a PPT presentation with audio, an animation, or a blog post - I am open to form.

To raise that stakes a wee bit, I want you to address whatever you create to your team or some stakeholders in your organization. I won't require you to send it out - but if you end up wanting to do so, fantastic. The goal is to introduce others to consider the detrimental effects of a current social arrangement and the possible benefits of changing that social arrangement ... It could also be an invitation for them to help you consider other social arrangements at your company that are having effects that are problematic (which are in turn spurring problematic thinking), as well as ways you might intervene to make new social arrangements for different effects / ideas.

Post whatever you create here in Canvas.

Step 3

How to Respond to a Collapsing Society? Read & Reflect on LinkedIn

Just last week Kenneth Bailey wrote a new article proposing something rather radical for workplaces (in terms of social arrangements). Read this article--[Doing Dishes in a Collapsing Society](#)--and share your reflections in our LinkedIn group.

Response

My CSI support work cohort is made up of science support staff and administration support staff. We function pretty well within a Green pluralistic organizational model. Everyone is equal and our assessments are based on perceived service to our STEM building community.

Essentially, as long as professors are not complaining, we are good. This setup is easy and adequate but completely unchallenging, uninspiring, and vapid. Fortunately, we are also given free reign to do what we wish. Watch youtube all day, take on grad school, pet projects, or build a makerspace (new arrangement). Yah!

The focus of the makerspace has always been to provide a place for the entire Trinity community to gather, make and explore. We are still a young community that is trying to flesh out who we are and what we can become. Ultimately our assessment value will be represented

by the student stories of making and belonging to a supportive community but currently we use a trifold assessment framework to provide some clarity.

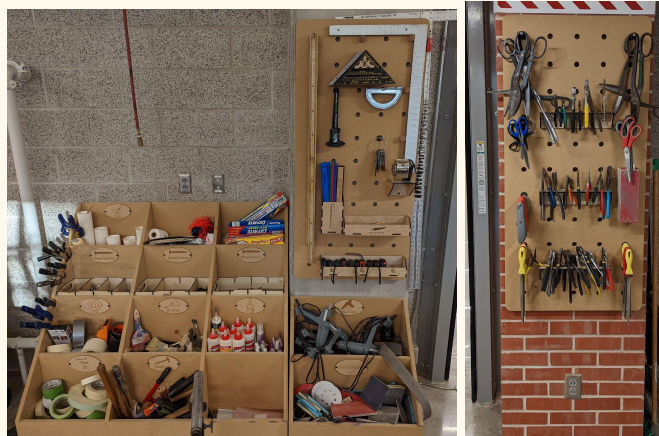
1. We look at how many and what kind of classes are using the space in their curriculum. We're up to 14 per year from 6 different disciplines, (Engineering, Biology, Communications, Art, Theater, & Education), indicating strong buy-in from faculty.
2. We track our upper administration's financial support. So far all of our equipment requests have been approved (around \$300k) and one fairly large expansion request has been denied (around \$250k). Strong financial support opens opportunities to what we could become.
3. We track who and what type of students, faculty and staff use the space. We have high numbers of participants and they are mostly engineering students. This speaks to who our community is and points out a matter of concern.
 - The community is students but homogenous
 - Matter of concern: How can we engage more non engineering students and diversify our community?

From the get go I developed the initial arrangements. Like shop policies, physical layout, and types of tools. And I've dabbled a fair amount with redefining these arrangements. A couple of examples of arrangement changes I've played around with are:

- (Old) Hard Arrangement: Hand tool storage in label drawers:
 - Effects: conceal tools from sight, visually clean, required knowledge of tool names, only one person could access at a time. Top drawers out of reach for shorter students.
 - Ideas: tools are hard to get to, an expert (me) needed to consult which tool to use and where to find it, tidiness is important



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- (New) Hard Arrangement: Hand tools stored on pegboards:
 - Effects: tools are visible and available, no need to know name, use can be intuited, multiple people could access at a time, visually overwhelming
 - Ideas: Anyone can use the tools, tools can be experimented with to discover use



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- (Old) Soft Arrangement: Initial safety training administered by an expert (me)
 - Effects: Students start to build relationship with the shop expert, top down delivery from a person the students don't relate too, knowledge is with the expert
 - Ideas: an expert needs to be consulted when using the space
- (New) Soft Arrangement: Initial safety training done by a student worker
 - Effects: students build a relationship with a student user, training delivered by a relatable peer, knowledge is with the students.

- Ideas: students can be makers and leaders in the space, students can consult with other students for making assistance, experts are not always needed

I feel like the above arrangement changes have been positive, but our matter of concern is current and still out of whack. Below are a couple of existing arrangements with potential alternatives:

- (Current) Soft Arrangement: Introduction to Makerspace poster is staff & faculty (6 men) to contact for help or to get into the makerspace.
 - Effects: one of these six experts provides access to the makerspace. Intimating for students, creates a barrier and inhibits engagement, lacks diverse representation
 - Ideas: makerspace requires permission from one of six men to access, knowledge is with the experts.
- (Future) Soft Arrangement: Introduction poster displaying makerspace student workers and users with links to bios and interests
 - Desired Effects: students see other students freely using the space, students are less reluctant to communicate peer to peer. Will engage and use the space more.
 - Desired Ideas: makerspace is open for use by students, students carey the knowledge, students share their knowledge
 - Potential issues: student worker groups need to be diverse to convey that all are welcome without having to say it.



- (Current) Soft Arrangement: 30 page shop policies
 - Effects: superficial, cover my ass kind of document. Does not convey spirit of community or engender ownership.
 - Ideas: Not my space or my community. Belongs to someone else
- (Future) Soft Arrangement: 30 page shop policies(i still have to cover my ass) + a community covenant created by the students and is a living changeable entity.
 - Desired Effects: Students can convey what is important to them, students feel a sense ownership of the space, students feel like they belong to a community
 - Desired Ideas: this is a community of students that supports students, faculty and staff