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Story-making: Re-imagining possible futures through collaborative world-building approaches

TURNER Jane; TABOADA Manuela*

Queensland University of Technology, School of Design

* Corresponding author e-mail: manuela.taboada@qut.edu.au

This paper discusses insights from a collection of workshops where participants were invited to engage in active imagination and play with world-building and collaborative story-making through activities inspired by improvisation and tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs). The purpose is to explore ways of dismantling the ingrained habits of current design methodologies; unlearn normalized ways of thinking and re-construct shared approaches for designing, making, rethinking and reframing problems. To achieve this, the authors interrogate three of the workshops seeking patterns and characteristics that might offer opportunities for tools that are less encumbered by the legacies of their western modernist colonialist roots. We believe that speculative tools such as these can provide a point of departure for discussing 'alternatives to alternatives' and make spaces for emergence. Exploring the potentials of such tools is not so much about radical change but about creating spaces for shared active-imagination and moments of re-creation and re-framing that leads to hopeful pluriversal futures.

pluriversal design, world-building, speculative tools, story-making

*Caminante, no hay camino,
se hace camino al andar.
Al andar se hace el camino,
y al volver la vista atrás*

Antonio Machado, 1973

Decolonising design and dismantling Lorde's 'master's tools' (2020) is a project fraught with paradoxes where as soon as we engage with new opportunities, we find ourselves caught in a mimetic process and re-cycling the same systems that flounder in experiential realities and contextualized dilemmas of what it might mean to 'decolonize' design. This is the nub of de Sousa Santos' call for alternatives to alternatives (2018) and the heartbeat of Escobar's (2020) dictum that 'another possible is possible'. We need to disrupt the system itself when re-imagining possible tools and dismantle its machinery, otherwise we remain entrapped in the same cycles. We need to unlearn some of the formal tenets of modernism embedded in Design as an epistemological system and collection of beliefs—one of which is a belief in itself—as a service and solver of problems.

The need to dismantle the tools of modernity arises out of the challenge we all face where there are no 'modern' solutions to problems generated through the systems of modernity (Escobar, 2004), or as Quijano (2000) observes, no way to achieve ideological change and social justice from within an epistemology of western modernism. Challenges like decolonializing and unlearning asymmetrical constructs of power or undoing global harm are enacted through the systems that support modernity and fallacies of universality with its meta-narrative of progress. These systems of the underside (Turner & Taboada, 2020) are created by stories woven into our societies over time through myths, meanings, fictions, histories and so-called *uni*-versal knowledges, Haraway's 'god trick' of the all-encompassing eye (Haraway, 1991). They act as legitimizing agents for Lyotard's 'grand narratives' of modernity (Lyotard, 1984) with its stories of progress. These stories are not always the formalised 'stories' that we might understand as being part of the western canon, although they might be carried by them. They are stories made through meaning and subjective experience and they are profoundly entangled in our daily lives and experiences. Disentangling them is no small task, rather it is a slow process of teasing apart the veils that obscure and systems that conceal them.

As a particularly powerful storytelling tool, Design is a primary agent of creating, affirming, perpetuating and reinforcing these systems (Subrahmanian, Reich, & Krishnan, 2020; Taboada, Rojas-Lizana, Dutra, & Levu, 2020). The power of design is not merely in its scaffolding for the creation of artefacts which design us back (Willis, 2006) but deeply embedded in those underlying systems and onto-epistemic understandings of itself (Escobar, 2018; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Finding ways to dismantle the act of designing and reveal its *story-ing* (Freire, 1972; Lorde, 2020) is a critical task which requires seeking alternatives to well-established and formalized, interiorized design methods, aims and visions. As such, stories themselves seem to be appropriate tools to disassemble and reconstruct such systems, to do so we need different kinds of stories, and ways of sharing stories that shrugs off Aristotle's dictum of beginning, middle and end that Boal (Boal, 2000) describes as an ideal tool for creating obedience to the status quo. Stories of being and meaning do not fit obediently into this form, they exist in the world, and we are born into them, caught in their cycles, adding our own contributions to them, and re-entangling in an on-going mimetic process. These stories are the hardest to access and change but the most critical for any possibilities for pluriversality. In Segato's (2018) words, the point is not to imagine a utopia but to engage in active imaginative process.

In this paper, we respond to de Sousa Santos' (2015) call for "alternatives to alternatives" and Escobar's (2018) idea that "other possibles are possible" and share an approach to imagining pluriversal worlds based on—not storytelling—but **story-making** together. Our drive is to discuss a potential way of dismantling current design methods by unlearning normalized ways of thinking and being in order to reconstruct multiple and shared approaches for designing, making, rethinking and reframing problems. To do this we explore playful and somewhat unexpected approaches that defy the sanctity of Design as a discipline and seeks instead Segato's (2018) urge for creating spaces for emergence and active imagination. Taking a critical hermeneutic approach, interpreting and seeking emergent themes, we reflect on a series of (originally) unconnected workshops where participants were invited to play through world-building and collaborative story-making activities inspired by tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) design and processes. While our reflections are still emerging, being processed and explored, we do see some potential pathways to enable the co-creation of methods for finding new alternatives to designing together. As such we argue that it might be possible to use some aspects of TRPG as tools to create spaces for co-designing without the boundaries of the existing worlds and by doing so, allowing for pluriversal concepts to flourish.

1. Tools for active imagination

Even the most well-intentioned design actually subverts principles of pluriversality. A dilemma is that our alternatives are often formed through the same epistemologies that sent us down the dominant Design path. The way in which we imagine pluriverses from the perspective of the *uni*-versal invariably falls into the cyclical trap that Schultz (Schultz et al., 2018) critique when they say that decolonizing design first requires unlearning design. The break from this paradox requires Freire's problem posing: How to reimagine ourselves in other parallel real or fictional (possible, future, speculative) worlds? How to engage with those alternatives and use them to re-imagine and to experience other ways of being in the world?

For Segato (2018) the answer is not to imagine a perfect future or a utopia, which are invariably derived from the grand narratives of the Enlightenment but instead to engage in what she calls 'active imaginative process'. Segato differentiates between imagination and active imagination because she sees imagination by itself in a similar way to the entangled stories of the mimetic process. Imagination invariably 'intervenes' in the process of thinking and is formed by the present asymmetries of the world and informed by the same grand narratives of modernism that those systems support. Active imagination, on the other hand, is a critically reflective process that can break the fossilisation of memory and identity imposed by that the western formal prescription of beginnings, middles and ends.

This kind of active imagination process can explain and reveal rather than define and identify. It can help imagine alternative worlds, place in it all the possible details and test actions that would seem plausible in those particular imagined situations. Segato's insight frames further questions and needs: active imagination needs **spaces for collaboration**, for **open communication**, **reflection**, and most importantly, **spaces that allow for agency and emergence**. In short, spaces for multiple onto-epistemologies and multiple worlds to come into being.

Without active imagination, the disassembling of the tools of colonisation can indeed fall into the trap that Lorde decries. The call to decolonize is not merely a call to overturn the colonized system and replace it with a another, it is rather an understanding that we need to go beyond decolonizing and unlearn the systems and processes of colonization. Escobar (2020) understands (colonial) design as production and things, an enabler of modernity, itself a product of design and the systems that feed on and desire its trappings. Our design tools are entangled in the modernist *uni*-verse—a road that

understands itself as moving into the singular future but which is in itself creating that future as it progresses. Instead of this singular future where we can already see the extreme damage of our choices, Escobar advises a return to a Zapatista concept of many worlds, or a world where many worlds can exist. This is not the same as the idea of multiple choices or even many perspectives on the one world, it is a call for an onto-epistemic change that allows many worlds to be and multiple narratives to co-exist equally.

When we come to decolonizing and dismantling the tools that we use, we have to ask how can we even begin to find trusted spaces where this can happen without the colonial constraints of design outcomes where imagination can be a risk? Can we find spaces that allow hope, revealing colonialism but not permitting it to define the outcomes? As we make stories and create whole worlds together, we wonder if this can become that space.

2. Story-making through world-building and collaboration

The path we explore here is based on playful collaborative story world-making activities informed by approaches that are more usually found in the making (and playing) of Tabletop Role Playing Games (TRPGs). These pen and paper collaborative and imaginative games are designed to provide experiences rather than pre-determined outcomes. They are about creating worlds where participants—players—can make their own stories together.

Segato's active imagination is evident in many forms of games and play. Particularly the more narrative kinds of games that allow players to embark on speculative journeys through multiple imagined worlds. The specific games that inspire the workshops described in this paper are the tabletop role-playing games, named for their analogue nature and typical place of playing—the players sit around a table together—and for their approach to storytelling—players take on a role in order to venture into a fictional world through play. TRPGs enable immersion into other 'imagined' worlds through playful environments offering opportunities for creative imagination that emerges from the experienced world albeit organised through its own rules, structured through the agreement of players to play.

In TRPGs players venture into a fictional or fictionalised world with a character sheet and pre-defined system (often using dice). They collaborate to create experiences together through oral recounts of actions taken. The more commercial forms of TRPGs (those based on Gygax and Arneson's *Dungeons and Dragons*) assume a moderator or choreographer of experience, someone to help players through the fictional worlds of the game, to present them with obstacles, play the part of the non-player characters they might meet. A Game Moderator (GM) in these sorts of TRPG systems is part referee, part storyteller, part director, part actor, part authority figure, part game designer. The GM brief is not dissimilar to Boal's theatrical director in a radical theatre event (2000) where they are the scene setter who encourages the audience to seize the stage and enact agency on events being portrayed. Contemporary TRPGs often minimise this GM role divesting some of their influences by sharing them with the players. For example some games use a more narrative-based system where dice rolls must be interpreted rather than merely read or calculated helping to dismantle the way that statistics-based systems such as the original *Dungeons and Dragons* create stereotypes through their dependence on percentiles and abstract number.

While many commercial versions of TRPGs are replete with stereotypical tropes of western high fantasy and the Cambellian notion of the mono-myth or the hero's journey, this is more a result of the storied context of their use rather than a defining feature of the form. The systems are open to other stories and other worlds. For example, a work like *Cannibal Halfling Gaming's Ngen Mapu*, a story world

inspired by Mapuche spirits which invites players to heal a damaged planet, or Connor Alexander's *Coyote and Crow*, a tabletop game setting created by first nation story-makers envisioning a world where the civilisations of the Cahokia Mounds thrived into an alternative future where colonisation didn't happen. The possibilities for active imagination in these story-making forms are enticing.

Critically, these analogue worlds made for playful story-making encourage pluriversal experiences. Such is the nature of the game space that many different players experience many worlds within the overall world setting. It is in part the nature of the game system itself which, being analogue, can only prescribe via the use of the character sheet and whatever way the results of actions can be randomized but which even then, player experiences are with the (fictional or fictionalised) world. They are connected to the world through the player's own world experiences and so contingent on the social and cultural realities of the player's own world but navigation of the story world is both collaborative (players engage with the fiction in groups), and agentic (players make their own choices and so effect the fiction).

This is a different approach to formal studies of play and games where they might be described as a separate activity or even in opposition to non-play activities. It is the kind of play that Malaby (2009) describes as indeterminate, part of the social and cultural realities of human lives which always carries within it the possibility of radical change. It is the kind of approach that Ginwright (2008) demands as an opening gambit to create opportunities for hope and collective imagination. And, as we discuss below, story-making in these pen and paper contexts bears many of the hallmarks of active imagination and opportunities for emergence.

In the context of this discussion, there are a number of general characteristics or traits that seem to us to be desirable, possible markers for the kinds of dismantling tools we seek:

Nurturing spaces

Whatever the system used, within the rules provided by the system, players have the freedom (Boal might call it 'liberty') to improvise within the fiction and the fictionalized world of the TRPG: their choices shape the direction and experience of the game. While often there is a context or a 'main' storyline or provocation, the players create their actions, movements, and sometimes whole worlds and futures as they play. Indeed, it is a story told by those who choreograph the pathways as they play through the worlds as players will often ignore their carefully thought through trajectory of encounters and challenges in favour of something they have imagined for themselves.

An aspect of this characteristic is that TRPG worlds and explorations within them must be 'safe' and nurturing spaces. That is, again not unlike Boal's spect-actors storming the stage and taking control of any actions there, players in a TRPG should be supported in exploring and discovering the possibilities of the fictional worlds in their own ways, making their own meaning and engaging in their own story-making—not merely performing a story crafted by someone else for them.

Active imagination spaces

This type of active engagement with the fiction of the setting supported by the system and artifacts, such as character sheets and dice, has been discussed as fostering individual reflection and personal creative identity exploration (Bowman, 2017) referred to in psycho-analytic practice as 'active imagination' and actually resonant with the definition that Segato (2012) gives although her version is more critical, less about individual and the self and more about the self in the world. In our TRPG worlds and explorations this aspect is one that can be fostered through (gameplay) system design. For example,

some TRPG systems such as the Balsera, Hicks and Donoghue's Fate system, are based on narrative tropes and approaches, demanding that players use their character sheets to describe **how they move through** and change the fiction rather than **what they do** to change it. The use of story-ing approaches in this system enables places and spaces to have their own embedded stories and a degrees of agency. This kind of designing actively changes the relationships between the player or agentic performer and the world from a action-outcome type of relationship to a more fluid open discussion of imagining and changing with the world.

Embodied spaces

Recognizing that the players can move through and effect change both within and with the world also demands that we acknowledge that any performative agency on the part of one player is bound to also have effects on the way that others in the group might enact their agency. The collaborative aspect of role-playing games flags a particular form of story-making. It can be said that TRPGs are akin to oral stories in the sense that players recount themselves and their actions contextualised in the world; they are spatial (Jenkins, 2004), because of the way that players will navigate the worlds they find themselves in; collaborative as the story changes and evolves as players influence each other through action in their journeys; and often continuous (going on for an evening, months or years). Stories and worlds also often expand and contract as players join or leave a group and add or remove their own stories to/from the ones already told.

Agentic spaces

The phenomenon of flexible, collaborative and continuous exploration means that a TRPG subverts the formal story structure. Players follow a storyline that might be chronological most of the time and carry the rhythms of the structure of beginning, middle and end, but which allows for other forms of narrative and order to break from linear patterns—patterns more reminiscent of the repetitive rhythms of Nicaraguan 'Robleto' where beginnings, middles and ends spiral around a line of repetition or some kind of defining statement. This is what allows for what we call 'performative agency' or the story-makers ability to make their own decisions and feel that they have been meaningful within the fiction itself.

Perhaps more importantly, when it comes to *creating* TRPG worlds and spaces for players to engage in performative agency and active imagination, the Aristotelian structure and constraints are an anathema. Worlds made for play and story-making are also made for open exploration and must be broad enough for a range of activities as well as deep enough and sufficiently detailed so that players really can make their own choices. TRPG worlds are essentially designed as multi-verses. They are made to allow for the emergence of multiple stories experiences. As they are today they are able to provide multiple worlds within the one world.

These traits distinguish TRPGs as accessible, collaborative story-making systems with potential spaces for emergence. They can be used as a tool to create spaces for designing without the boundaries of the existing worlds and by doing so, allowing for pluriversal concepts to emerge. It is important to realise that there are two levels of engagement with TRPGs: the making of the game, and the playing of the game. Both aspects can be collaborative and one influences the other, as players actively change the game's worlds, stories and other players as they journey together, allowing us to say that the act of playing in and with a TRPG world mirrors the act of designing in its potentially ontological condition.

3. Exploring patterns and themes in TRPG-based workshops

The projects discussed in this section arise from different design contexts and adapt a number of different elements from TRPGs. They occurred in different sites and emerged from different research questions, curiosities and needs. The first project is about sharing knowledge by building it into a world that could then be explored by players; the second is set as part of a workshop series framed as opportunities for speculative imagining and ‘what if’ scenarios and the third helped participants re-imagine what research might look like in sustainability endeavours.

These examples of story-making as practice and praxis took place over the course of a few years—they were never intended to be part of the same project—the connection between them has emerged through reflection and the process of adapting games design approaches to create provocations for collaborative engagement. Most importantly, these projects were all executed as workshops with their own individual purposes and specific goals. They are not games as such and were never essentially about play, rather they were all about story-making and stimulating emergent process through game design and playful approaches. The workshops were designed to allow participants to share experiences, find alternative ways of communicating with and encounter the worlds of others; they were designed to focus on process and experience.

1.1. Workshop 1: Building collective identity

This workshop was organised as a way to engage academic researchers into sharing and framing their identities within their research centre. Due to COVID-19 restrictions in place at the end of 2020, the workshop had to be designed in a way that allowed participants to engage with each other’s stories without actually being all in the same room at the same time. It was a requirement that the workshop was not run online.

As such, the workshop was designed as a self-paced “quest” experience set up in an ample room, where participants would visit multiple “stations” to engage with different experiences in each of them. As they “actioned” their roles through the quest, at each stage they left behind messages, tokens, or signs of their interactions for the others who followed, creating a unique shared world for themselves as they added the bits of their own stories and personalities to each station.

While navigating through the room and engaging with each activity, participants enacted their “characters” (in this case, themselves) and had the opportunity to chat with other participants who happened to be passing by at the same time. This allowed for free, unstructured and unplanned conversations, and future connections that were not mediated, but simply provoked by the activities at hand.

This workshop model was an experiment, and after reflecting on the activities, outcomes and feedback received from participants, the authors believe that it actively (i) created spaces for **performative agency**, through allowing participants to create and modify the “world” as they completed each activity and left their story pieces behind; (ii) provided a good level of **freedom (liberty)** for participants to interact with the activities and with each other—as there was no GM, its role was diluted through passive instructions in each station, the participants had the freedom to choose to follow it, or not. In fact, they had total freedom to actually choose to engage on the activities or not at all; (iii) allowed for **active imagination** and **emergence**, as some of the activities were designed as an “open space” for reflection, future thinking and feedback.

1.2. Workshop 2: World-building for story-making

While our possibilities for story-making in these analogue pen and paper worlds might be extraordinary, the worlds themselves remain, to paraphrase Quijano, embedded within the epistemology of the designer. Stories told and meaning made within a constructed story world must ultimately depend on the designed world for context. As Ricœur (1984) tells us, the world as context is more than mere backdrop; it is an essential actor in the mimetic process and a powerful participant in the construction of meaning (Turner & Bidwell, 2007). If the story world itself is such an important collaborator in the meaning-making activity of players, then how much more powerful is the imagining and design of the story world and can the designing of TRPG story worlds become a hopeful space for active imagination? This was the logic behind the Rolling Stories project (Turner, 2019).

The workshop was a response to media simplification of science, the phenomenon of the single news bite without context or detail. This often means that science research is presented as simple flat statements without any of the subtleties, caveats, reservations and contexts that are required for understanding. The idea behind the workshops was that scientists could work collaboratively and make game worlds for players who would then engage with science knowledge as they moved through the world. This workshop took place over four hours. Participants came from a number of different science areas within the hosting university—from plant biology to robotics. Workshop participants were introduced to the core concept of TRPGs: the context and setting (the world that the participants (players) create their stories within) and they were invited to speculate as science practitioners of possible futures and alternative worlds and then flesh out the details of the world using some tools and techniques devised for teaching game design. There was much discussion overall and a lot of playful world building, however for the current discussion the most interesting aspects of the workshop were that the story-making process evidenced the following characteristics:

Many of the participants were clearly engaged and active in terms of Boal's **liberty to improvise** within the fiction of the world. One group in particular left mundane science behind and moved into rich speculation of future possibilities. The participants (now players taking on the role of designers) didn't just contribute but collaborated, each building on and sharing speculations and possibilities about the world they were designing. This group never really completed the world building but they did seem to find a safe place for an exchange of more individual stories and speculations about what these stories might mean in multiple possible futures. The **safe and nurturing space** is clearly more critical than merely agreeing to 'play the game'— another group in the same workshop never managed to find that safe place for active imagination and seemed to remain in a spectator space.

Were they engaging in active imagination? At the time this wasn't a question, and it is only in retrospect that reflecting on the way the workshop participants explored possibilities beyond their usual knowledge spaces can be understood as a dismantling of the normal prescribed forms of imagination and speculation for their professions and a venture into **active imagination and process**. This was key in terms of the project outcomes, the world building participants actually didn't explore their own work very much at all, it was more that they **explored the possibilities of the spaces that their work occupied and did so collaboratively**. So, even though this was a workshop set up as a research project and not a played TRPG, we could still discern the basic features and traits on the world-making process itself.

1.3. Workshop 3: Story-making through collaborative world-building

This workshop arose as a result of curiosities and experiences of the two choreographers from the previously described workshops. It is where they came together and discovered some possibilities for the playful world-building story-making to become a critical tool. This workshop was a short one-off

activity presented at the 2020 DRS conference which took place online. The main idea was to focus on some basic world-building and fictional engagement with possibilities without the longer time frames of the previous workshops and without any constraints in terms of who the participants might be, other than they were conference attendees.

The event offered a playful method to engage participants from different disciplines in opportunities for communication, connection, self-reflection and change. We followed Gaver's (2002) call for designers to understand themselves as *Homo Ludens*, people who are not just creative and imaginative but also playful, and suggested that game design and play have been accepted as speculative spaces that facilitate opportunity for critical play. The workshop also intended to explore questions about the way that critical play goes beyond entertainment and acts as a portal to creative expression, an instrument for conceptual thinking and a tool for social change.

In the workshop, participants were given a quick introduction to the idea: they were going to be thrown into a future speculative world and given a major provocation or twist on the current reality, and some simple everyday contexts (households, hospitality businesses, primary schools). They were asked to imagine what their worlds and experiences during normal day-to-day activities would be like. The general goal of the workshop was to test early ideas about using TRPG approaches as a way of avoid looking for immediate solutions and, instead, engage in reflective process. The results were playful and interesting in terms of the announced workshop goals of critical play.

In terms of the characteristics of TRPGs that we are using as markers for potential tools to dismantle and re-imagine pluriversal worlds, they were less successful than the other two workshops described here. Certainly, the participants in the workshop did engage in critical agency, they collaborated and explored possibilities and made meaningful decisions and choices about the fiction in which they found themselves. However, the short time allocated and the lack of embodiment in the virtual space appeared to undermine the nurturing space aspect of the other two workshops. This in turn meant that while there was evident imagination, the active imagination that we are seeking in this reflection was less visible. That is, participants did indeed imagine themselves in contexts in a world where the provocation had occurred, but this happened in a more individualistic way which was not shared or got contextualised the world. In many ways, this workshop is the most telling for us when we reflect on what this all might mean for dismantling those tools of the grand narrative.

4. Discussion and reflections

The three examples presented are part of an emerging reflective process—they were never set up as a unified method. In fact, they came together as they presented similar patterns which showed that these types of future-building speculative experiences can be a good tool for reflecting upon and 'alternatives to alternatives'. The three projects exhibit a range of the common characteristics presented in Table 1.

The third workshop is of particular interest because, while we saw critical agency and playful collaboration, the context and lack of embodiment, or rather translation of embodiment through virtual communication portals, the participants didn't seem to engage in active imagination. Instead, they remained, as Segato attests, encumbered by imagination that is influenced and structured by the context of the world but which doesn't reach beyond into active imagination which includes reflection on the world itself.

Table 1 Mapping desirable TRPG design traits against workshop themes and patterns

	Nurturing Spaces	Active Imagination	Embodied Spaces	Agentic Spaces
Workshop 1	There were many opportunities for participants to engage freely with each other and connect over the subject of each station, or on any other matter.	Participants were able to modify the world as they engaged with each activity, leaving behind their collaboration to the whole	Participants were influenced by others as they engaged with what was left on each station by the previous “player”.	Participants had the power to choose which activity to engage with at any moment. There was a suggested—not imposed—structured, that could be adapted by each participant as they pleased.
Workshop 2	Participants found a safe, neutral space to discuss issues related to their own and other areas, and to imagine possible (or impossible!) futures together.	By being called to create future words, participants engaged in active imagination by design.	By working together in the same physical space at the same time over the same task, participants influenced each other’s actions and ideas as they created their imagined worlds together.	Participants were engaged in a highly collaborative world-building activity, however, this was a one-off short activity where there was no active play over a longer or continuous period of time.
Workshop 3	There was little opportunity for nurturing spaces where players could feel in control, due to the online aspect of this workshop.	Participants didn’t seem to engage in active imagination	Online environment did not allow for embodiment and therefore there was little influence of participants over each other.	Little active imagination and the lack of embodied spaces limited the possibilities of participants to interfere in the nature of the “game”.

All the workshops were designed in a way that the TRPG-inspired story sharing strategies created opportunities for story-making moments. The different projects are thus connected by the use of TRPG approaches and a focus on story-making as opposed to / in addition to storytelling. This is not the storytelling that coerces obedience that Boal detests but the active storytelling that constructs identity. This understanding of storytelling is the recounting of events, be they fictional or experienced. Paul Ricoeur’s concept of narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1984) suggests that we situate ourselves in the world and in time through a continuous cycle of narration which is itself entangled in on-going narrations around us. Design as a story-making and storytelling tool plays a significant role in weaving the mesh of stories that we will find ourselves entangled into. However, Design offers identity through identification - it *identifies* (Spivak, 1988; Star, 1991) whereas the ability and freedom to tell one’s own story is an act of power (Adichie, 2009; King, 2003).

In *story-making* this act of power is amplified through the application of the story-telling to a world. This application in turn allows the story to be amplified and experienced by others. It is opportunity for active and even interactive imagination; it can create a feedback mimetic loop in its own right as it re-imagines worlds. This is the speculative space which we are interested in, not the colonized space of Speculative Design which announces Design as its master in its name but the imagination space of speculative fiction world-building which allows entry into the mimetic cycle through stories of possible futures (Abu Hatoum, 2021).

The notion of re-imagining worlds, returning to play and stories seems to have possibilities for returning to the experiences of the world, re-making the world and re-imagining alternatives where decolonial

thought is not only applied as a theoretical concept to inform and guide design methods but where the tools and methods we create can be themselves de-colonizable as they happen within the mimetic cycle of story-making. In this way we might find opportunities for multiples, multiple epistemologies, multiple ontologies, multiple meaning-makings. As Conway and Singh (2011) point out, notions of the pluriverse imply multiple ontologies, multiple worlds to be known—not simply multiple perspectives within one world.

Another feature worth reflecting upon is the embodied nature of collaboration and story-making. Shared collaborative storytelling and oral storytelling in particular have power because they can never be disconnected from the teller as stories are bound to the meanings and experiences of those who create, tell and listen to / experience the story. This offers a powerful space to not only engage people in telling stories with each other—and, as such, learn and unlearn about other ways of being, knowing and living in the world—but also to engage people in creating stories together, stories that can embed the collective pluriverses to create speculative, fictional or future worlds (Abu Hatoum, 2021) which can be a basis for understanding and designing together for the future; stories that can foster active imagination and which can create a nurturing space for Escobar’s possibilities for possibilities and de Sousa Santos’ alternatives to alternatives.

This is the kind of opportunity found in the sharing of stories in yarnning circles—collaborative story sharing where discussion is in a context of trust and not predicated to any kind of resolution but to an on-going process of understanding. It is also the kind of opportunity that Augusto Boal (2005, p. 5) talks about in his workshops when he says that the “The Theatre of the Oppressed creates spaces of liberty where people can free their memories, emotions, imaginations, thinking of their past, in the present, and where they can invent their future, instead of waiting for it”.

Deconstructed TRPGs used as a method for world-building and collective story-making can create nurturing spaces for collaboration, open communication, and reflection, allowing for agency and emergence to happen. The kind of process presented here shows that TRPGs, when used as an engagement tool can successfully stimulate the imagination of future worlds by creating spaces for designing without the boundaries and expectations of the existing world—and its constant need to produce outcomes.

We believe that this kind of unbounded, creative world-building approach allows for multiple views to be embedded in the process of designing together to enable many viable solutions for pluriversal futures, rather than one universal solution for many futures. We also believe that it should be possible to emulate pluriverses through TRPGs, if we are able to imagine a system where players can navigate from world to world through game play and story-making without ever needing to have one world that encapsulates all others.

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About the Authors

Dr Jane Turner is a game and interaction design educator and researcher. Her research focuses on place-making and the material and cultural aspects of world designing and the ways that design and designing are mimetic 'story-ing' practices.

Dr Manuela Taboada is a designer, researcher and senior lecturer working across environmental sciences and design. Her background in complex emergency, design activism and decolonial design defines the way she critically engages transdisciplinary and multi-cultural teams to design change and systems transitions.