

"The Neological Institute" performance aka how language can inspire and empower design

Keywords: foresight, design fiction, linguistics

1. Workshop Organisers

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2. Context of Workshop

In a rapidly changing world we are often confronted with the inadequacy of our current vocabularies of words and expressions in describing new meanings, new phenomena. Existing words, bloated with connotations and meanings of former times, or the lack of words to keep up with the challenge of accurately describing a rapidly revolving present, often do more than create mere confusion. They hinder our ability to point towards, describe and debate, and overall understand the meaning of newly emerging phenomena or yet non-existent responses to future challenges. This is one dimension in which neologisms can be 'generative' and open new pathways to an emerging future, enabling to convey new meanings and hence 'imagine' - i.e. turn into a mental or physical image - how that meaning might be expressed.

A second dimension can be found in the ability of new words and expressions to evoke entire worlds around them. They are atomic versions of future scenarios. Compressed universes that once pronounced or read lead to a big bang of new envisionings and understandings.

While it is often heard that an image can say more than a thousand words, one could easily also argue that a neologism could evoke a thousand images of potential meaning. As people hear a word that they do not recognise - yet seemingly hints at something - they are lured into a game of hypothesising potential meanings, to feel their way around the word and what it might mean, to explore the context from which its meaning might have emerged. This is a second dimension in which neologisms are generative and create - rather than merely describe - new worlds and new meanings.

Fantasy and science fiction writers have often resorted to the creation of neologisms and even completely new languages, as constructs stemming from and depicting parts of a deeper, underlying cultural context foreign to their audience.

This workshop has a two-fold aim: i.e. a) to explore the potential of a series of language games to create neologisms and understand their generative value as design tools for the embodiment and exploration of future worlds and their phenomena, b) to engage participants in a design performance of which the fictional nature enhances the experience and allows them to understand its potential as a research/engagement tool.

3. Planned Activities and Expected Outcomes

The workshop is framed as a role play/design performance, entitled "The Neological Institute" (inspired by <http://napkinfutures.tumblr.com/post/120761896680/nf036-the-neological-institute>). All participants are members of an institute set in a future world with the sole purpose of producing neologisms as seeds of innovation. The societal and economic value of the institute lies in their creative ability to craft neologisms as

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catalyst for new worlds and contexts of meaning, bodies of inspiration for the design of solutions for today's and possible future problems/challenges.

During the **first part of the day** the participants will be welcomed as new members/employees of the Neological Institute. They will be familiarised by the organisers with the workings of the institute, the different roles of people in the organisation and mechanisms by which neologisms are created (language games).

Through language games as design tools, different flavors of neologisms will be created. E.g. neologisms to describe phenomena from future worlds (for which the context will be given), neologisms to generate new worlds by rehashing/morphing existing words into new ones, etc.

Furthermore they will craft their own products/services for 'clients' out in the world. (e.g. intake forms to understand wishes/requests from clients, knowledge organisation tools for neologisms, tools to explore/understand alternative logics, testing tools for neologisms and their perceived meanings, ...). As such the concept of the Institute, including its aesthetics (cf. engaging representations of neologisms, performance space, etc.) evolves further.

During the **second part of the day**, participants will open the institute to visitors (e.g. during afternoon/afternoon break of conference) and engage with them offering their services. Neologisms will be created using existing and newly developed tools/methods. Their impact and capacity to inspire and uncover new possibilities/solutions/imaginable futures will be tested and people's hypotheses around them recorded.

4. Intended Audience

10-15 people of mixed background

5. Length of Workshop

1 day

6. Space and Equipment Required

- flexible, well (day)lit working space with at least 10 separate tables (no aula, no fixed table setting)
- ±18 chairs
- 30 white cardboard boxes (±70cmx50cmx50cm) + same colour paper-tape
- projector (with microphone and speakers depending on acoustic quality of the room)
- 10 lab coats
- white paint, markers, box cutters, roll of white plotter paper, paper cards of various sizes etc.
- printer

7. Potential Outputs

- a first (online) edition of the Neological Institute's glossary of neologisms and reflections by participants on the worlds to which they gave rise
- insight into the potential of new language games/tools as design (research)/foresight instruments

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- an engaging experience during the conference
- participants discover the value of performance/roleplay to set the stage for interaction and alternative design research
- participants discover the generative power of language in general and neologisms in particular

About the Organisers

Nik Baerten

Nik Baerten is co-founder of the Antwerp (B) based foresight & design studio, Pantopicon, which crafts provocative futures in order to stimulate debate regarding tomorrow's challenges and opportunities. They support both public and private organisations in exploring the long term, in building visions and strategies, in designing concepts for new products, services and experiences. As such they assist in the participatory understanding of systemic change and exploration of new models of value creation. Nik also lectures on foresight and design at the LUCA School of Arts and is a frequent speaker on both methodological and future-related topics.

Virginia Tassinari

Virginia Tassinari is assistant professor at LUCA School of Arts (Belgium), Executive Board Member of the Cumulus Association and of DESIS Network (Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability), and founder of the DESIS Philosophy Talks, an initiative in which design for social innovation and philosophy are brought into dialogue. She is currently involved in the co-editing of a book entitled *"The pearl diver. Storytelling and design for social innovation"*.