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Making strange: Risk, design & foresight
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What are the biggest obstacles to innovation?

- Uncertainty and risk
- Internal financing
- Lack of skills
- Market size
- External financing
- Regulatory issues
- Agreement with external collaborators
- Intellectual property
- Government competition policy

What is innovation?

Is it a new technology?
Is it a process?
An outcome?
What is innovation?

“An idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption”


“Creating a new paradigm... changing the rules and changing the game”

—Dubberly et al. 2007. A Model of Innovation
dubberly.com/concept-maps/innovation.html
Innovation means novelty, creativity, risk. Yet risk is seen as an obstacle.

What gives rise to this situation?

“Uncertainty today is not just an occasional, temporary deviation from a reasonable predictability; it is a basic structural feature of the business environment.”

—Pierre Wack, 1985
So how does your organization deal with risk & uncertainty?
Ambiguity and risk perception

There is no perception without interpretation

—Gadamer 1960; Kihlstrom 2002

“Ambiguity effect”: Cognitive bias describing our tendency to avoid options for which missing information makes the probability seem “unknown”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambiguity_effect

"Kaninchen und Ente" (“Rabbit and Duck”) Fliegende Blätter, 23 October 1892
quick exercise

The next slide is ambiguous.
What is the *meaning* of this scene?
Ambiguity
Q: Which practices deal *creatively* with ambiguity & risk?  

A: art & design
sLab is “human centred”

We place human needs, desires, behaviour and culture at the heart of the process

Our process may be seen as:

- problem finding: foresight
- problem framing: strategy
- problem solving: design
sLab design & foresight model

- Futures thinking
- Systems thinking + visual thinking
- Business thinking
- Design thinking
Master of Design in Strategic Foresight & Innovation (SFI)

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Idea Couture
Leo Burnett
Mayo Clinic

Startups / rebrandings
Art & Science
The Mission Business
Perceptual.com
ZanCom Media
We map ambiguity & complexity

Protecting Canadians & Vulnerable Workers in a Global Economy

Since 1975, Canada’s economy has expanded and changed dramatically. Globalization has had major impacts on the economy, including the expansion of the services sector, increased competition, and the rise of the gig economy. These changes have led to significant shifts in the labor market, with many traditional industries declining and new ones emerging. The growth of the gig economy has introduced new forms of work arrangements, such as freelancing and on-demand work, which have implications for workers’ rights and protections.

We map ambiguity & complexity

Maggie Dempster, Pansy Lee, and Simon Trevarthen, 2014PT
Design thinking is about *sensemaking*, isn’t it?

Designers excel at coaching, practicing, and theorizing how to make sense of complex or ambiguous situations & information.

Yet sometimes what is needed is not sensemaking. Sometimes what is needed is *strangemaking*.

That’s where *foresight* comes in.
What is foresight?

“the ability to create and sustain a variety of high quality forward views and to apply the emerging insights in organizationally useful ways... to detect adverse conditions, guide policy, shape strategy; to explore new markets, products & services.”

— Richard Slaughter, 1999

“A systematic, participatory, future intelligence gathering,...vision-building process aimed at present-day decisions & mobilising joint actions”

— EC FOREN project
sLab & SFI design+foresight methodology

Adapted from Popper, 2008, Foresight Methodology
Making strange
Making strange

Making strange (приём остранения)
—Viktor Shklovsky, 1917

Alienation effect (Verfremdungseffekt)
—Bertold Brecht

“Making the strange familiar, and the familiar strange”
—Stuart Brand, founder of GBN and Long Now Foundation
Failing better


— Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho*
Design+Foresight at OCAD U
Tangible Futures, Design Fictions
in Helen Kerr’s Leading Innovation, 2012

Robert Mitchell & Laura Fyles
Design-Foresight at OCAD U
Tangible Futures, Design Fictions
in Helen Kerr’s Leading Innovation, 2012

Ben McCammon, Rich Norman, Kelvin Kwong
Design+Foresight at OCAD U
Tangible Futures, Design Fictions
in Helen Kerr’s Leading Innovation, 2012

Ben McCammon, Rich Norman, Kelvin Kwong
Figure 13: A Gephi visualization depicting the network of interactions on Twitter between ByoLogyc staff (grey), ByoLogyc websites (blue), EXE (red), and ZED.TO participants (green). (2012)
Critical Design
“Use of speculative design proposals to challenge narrow assumptions, preconceptions and givens about the role products play in everyday life...”

Dunne & Raby. http://www.dunneandraby.co.uk/content/bydandr/13/0

Design Fiction
“The deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change”

Bruce Sterling. @bruces quoted in @futuryst Stuart Candy 29 Jan, 2012

Science Fiction Prototyping
“What if we could use stories, movies and comics as a kind of tool to explore the real world implications and uses of future technologies today?”

Q: What comes from risk+design+foresight?

A: Overcoming hype; crossing the chasm
Q: What comes from risk+design+foresight?

A: Social innovation

“Optimism is a moral choice, it’s a business choice... which is a healthy progression for change”
@chelseaclinton @clintonfdn #cgi2014
Q: What comes from risk+design+foresight?

A: “Risk design” as strategy

“By soliciting risks and handling them ostentatiously yet seemingly effortlessly, [Norman Foster’s “Gherkin” building] accrued capital for the clients and the City of London, for the architects and their consultants—and also for design as a risk management practice. With each solicitation, gain, & management of risk, the design acquired agency by becoming a stronger branding instrument.”

Many thanks

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