REHEARSING
THE
FUTURE
Rehearsing the Future

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THIS BOOK IS TRULY A RESULT
OF COLLABORATION;

PIECE TOGETHER FROM MANY
SOURCES, WRITTEN BY MANY
CONTRIBUTORS AND COORDI-
NATED BY MANY EDITORS.

HOWEVER, THERE WOULD
NOT HAVE BEEN ANYTHING
TO WRITE ABOUT WITHOUT
THE WORKS AND LIVES OF
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BY NAME ELSEWHERE IN
THE BOOK.

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Joachim Halse, Eva Brandt,
Brendon Clark & Thomas Binder
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Prototyping: Act It Out!

Stakeholder involvement and design dialogue are not just means to understand the user, harvest ideas or create commitment on top of the conventional innovation process. All too often it is forgotten that innovation is as much about re-organizing how things are done as it is about inventing new things to do. Innovation as a process of change and learning makes it obvious that invention has to go hand in hand with rehearsing what this invention entails. Prototyping is one of the ways to work with innovation from “the outside in.”

Getting all stakeholders on board in a creative dialogue from day one turns the relation between product and process on its head. Acting it out gives innovation a thrust that bridges the gap between plan and implementation.

Prototypes have been well known to designers and engineers for a long time. When a team of technicians has been working for some time on solutions to specific design problems within their individual specialty, a prototype is made to see how the different parts go together. The purpose can be to see if the parts are actually functioning together, but a prototype can also be made to examine size, appearance, interaction or other characteristics of the final product. What makes it a prototype is that it somehow “does the right thing” with respect to use, and in this way “sets the type” for the final product. The prototype is useful because it makes it possible for one specialized technician (like a chemist) to see if his solution works together with the solutions of other specialists (like software engineers or computer scientists). There is not one specialist who “owns” the prototype. The prototype is a shared model of what the customer and user will eventually see when the work is completed.

More recently designers of IT systems have reversed this process by working from prototypes to detailed design solutions. Instead of making the prototype from various parts within a solution they start with rough models of what the users and customers will experience. If they work on computer systems they will start to prototype what the user will see on the screen. Here the user becomes the expert as he or she will be the one who can judge how the prototype makes sense when in use. The important thing is not the individual prototype, but rather the process of prototyping through which the IT designers and the users together work on the prototypes in order to get to a reasonably detailed understanding of what the system must accomplish. Specialized technicians and detailed technical solutions are still important, but as the design is created “through the interface”, the guiding image becomes the evolving prototype. Customers and users left alone are not designers; neither are marketing staff nor managers.

Successful prototyping takes collaboration of all stakeholders playing the role of experts in their respective domains.

The prototyping approach

Today, prototyping is approached more broadly, and in fields where the notion of interface is not as clear-cut as in computer systems. Working iteratively from rough to detailed prototypes is a very different process from working from the parts towards the whole. But what does prototyping mean if we consider innovation in the waste industry or in mobile services where system and possible experiences of use.

Improvisation and acting out

Imagine again an innovation process in which new mobile services between public authorities and citizens are considered. Such a process could begin with an identification of the key stakeholders. If daycare again was chosen as a case, we could bring together daycare staff, the relevant professionals of mobile service IT systems (for example those who are to design and support the technical infrastructure), the parents, the kids (perhaps) and so on. We would not need to specify much more than the option that mobile phone messaging may support the communication between daycare center and parents, before prototyping could get started. Someone from the daycare staff may open the discussion by suggesting that it would be nice to be able to
Prototyping is not only a generative process of ideation. It is just as much a rehearsal of new practices.

Discussions like these may be difficult to act upon if they only occur around a meeting table. It may be both difficult to explain and to imagine what it will mean for daycare staff to be "always-on" for the parents' messages, and it may take more thought for the parents to consider what to do with a slideshow of pictures from the kids' day at the center. Already around the meeting table the participants are acting out a new relationship as they are discussing with one another what it would mean to have these new kinds of services. We will take the theatrical metaphor further by suggesting that what is negotiated around the table (or at some other setting) is like a stage upon which the different participants both project aspirations and imagine themselves to be if what is discussed becomes reality. The more participants are able to bring in experiences, images and stories on how the negotiation the more vivid this stage becomes and as we will also come back to in other texts, leaving the table and actually creating this stage at the actual sites where it is imagined will enable the participants to not only think but also enact what it will mean to them to engage with whatever is negotiated. The actual prototype, be it a new kind of mobile phone, a particular kind of message or some other new thing, can enact the stage as a prop that evokes new ideas and guides the improvisation of possible scenarios. To work as a prop the scenarios should be very clearly specified. Again taking the daycare example, a parent enacting a scenario may actually be the one who in the act can see what that the service should provide is perhaps not a text but an image and a short audio note. The technical people do not have to stay outside this process but can jump in to clarify what they consider possible or viable. The improvisation of a particular episode may be mainly in the hands of one of the stakeholders, but it will almost inevitably presuppose or invite others to play a corresponding role. Through such improvisations, a set of coherent scenarios may emerge. As these are videotaped or documented in some other way they can become important documents that convey the innovation potential to others. They may resemble scenarios scripted by designers and enacted by professional actors and can serve many of the same purposes.

What makes improvised scenarios and co-created prototypes particularly valuable is that they represent the outcome of interactions among stakeholders, who have already exercised their potential.

We (still) need things to hold on to

The success of a new service or a new product depends on what people do with it. One may even sometimes have difficulties separating a service from the change of, for example, communication that it enables. When we worked on new recycling systems offering waste-collectors or retail shop owners new roles, the effect we are seeking to obtain is often new relationships that will make people do new things (for example deliver more sorted waste for recycling). One could ask why we are not just exploring this new relationship head on, instead of prototyping new practices that involve different containers for collection or new communication channels among citizens and waste sector professionals.

There are two reasons why we need to hold onto the things. First we have to realize that values, preferences and motivations, which play a crucial role in relationships, are not just stable entities that carry along with them. We all act in situations where both people and things "speak to us" and invoke different kinds of relationships. Only very few relationships are so strong and so stable that we can maintain them without bringing re-minded of the things around us. Even less are we able to imagine the new kinds of relationships might mean if we are not prompted by things that indicate to us how a new situation is established. Second and similarly important, things are what keep us aligned and connect-ed across the very different activities in which each of us is engaged. For the citizen the opportunity to return used batteries or packaging to shops means that preparation for shopping involves considering how to take the stuff back. An associated discount on concrete things is introduced a whole new set of matters of concern will arise. If some suggest bags to customers to bring home for battery collection then the shop owner may start thinking about where to get them, who will pay, and where in the shop to put them until picked up by the customer. The things are also a reason why the municipality staff may worry what happens if the bags turn up at the recycling station. All these concerns are productive, because they disclose problems and possibilities. They may be troublesome at times because they take what is in principle a good idea down into the nitty-gritty details about responsibilities, ownership and commitments. But this is also precisely why we need to work with things as we explore relationships.

Prototyping is acting out but it is simul-taneously the shaping of things that tie the acting together.

A different proof of concept

The mobile services envisioned by a group of designers may look very similar (even identical) to the mobile services that come out of a collabora-tion among a diverse group of stake-holders. Both may even come out of several iterations of prototyping where new practices are prototypically enacted and where the things that keep them aligned are become detailed enough to actually be made.
This reportage will bring you close to four brief episodes where design ideas are performed as drama. The focus is on facilitating the performances rather than on the particular design ideas developed. All four episodes occurred in the Golden Project Mobile Public Services, page 194, carried out for a client by 1508 with two participating public stakeholders: a kindergarten and a job center. Before each of the episodes recounted here, central stakeholders, including users of the job center and parents of the kindergarten children, worked together to imagine what future services might offer their field.

Here, I will recount in relatively concrete terms four episodes I experienced while in the position of facilitator and co-designer. In subsequent reflections on what can be learned from the episodes, I draw on a broader awareness of “performativity” and previous experiences with facilitating similar improvised performances.

As the design performances in all four episodes below begin, the stakeholders have just reached some partial agreements on what constitutes relevant future services. The ideas are not defined in any detail – just enough to leave the sketches and text on the table of the meeting room still intact. Hence, they are ready to begin their bodily interactions in their respective social and physical contexts: the kindergarten and the job center.

**Episode 1.**
A parent setting her self off
A design group of three walk around in the kindergarten in the depths outside of Copenhagen: Sten with whose child is here every day while she is at work, Steen, whose organization is interested in what public services delivered to citizens on mobile devices might look like in the near future, and me, a design researcher and facilitator of the event. We are in the process of setting a scene where we can explore how the service of institutionalized childcare may be enhanced with the help of mobile electronic devices.

We are not actually using any mobile electronic devices, but rather trying out how childlike practices could play out if we had had them.

As Lisbeth walks toward the children’s wardrobe, she reflects: “uhm... but are we now doing that part ‘beep, now I am taking Aston home with me’?” Laughing out loud, she continues: “No, I simply can’t do that! That’s beyond my limits... It’s too much...” I search for a workable alternative: “you don’t have to say beep; we could also do something else...”

After a brief discussion on alternatives, I return to the action of “checking out” before taking a child home: “Couldn’t you then just push a button? What if there were different buttons... I don’t know... Maybe you have a suggestion that you could live with?”

Lisbeth takes up the idea of a less hi-tech interaction: “Okay that’s fine, I push here, then I get the message, and I’ll notify Steen that I will also take his child home.” Lisbeth continues the enactment of a routine situation of her everyday life, supported by imaginary technological support.

Looking back at the video footage, despite Lisbeth’s laughing, there is an obvious relief in the scene, that is emphasized by her unwillingness to cross a certain boundary. In a single moment she considered if she could see herself doing a particular virtual technology (i.e. the idea of a possible technology of the future) and quite clearly declined. Practically speaking, it was only her own personal technology that was implemented into something that could be reconciled with her proper image of the relationship between her son and herself; the illusion of a future mobile service could be restored and we could collectively return to the scenario and pick up the story.

The dependency on the participant’s personal considerations, whether or not she can see herself in the proposed situation, is a small indication that we
are generally not interested in make-believe as it is not actual. In staging design performances of unknown futures, it is exactly this balance of seriousness and playfulness that we are after. The credibility of the scenario depends on Libbeth believing in her possible role in it. Design-wise it would be completely unintestining with a scenario in which Libbeth, pretending to be a particular character, is pretend to be someone who fits the character of an imagined scenario. In the recreated situation, Libbeth is not playing a role or a character but simply acts as herself, under slightly changed conditions.

There is an important element of playfulness in pretending that a simple prop is actually an advanced technological device, but as with children playing, there must also be ways of expressing skepticism without entirely breaking the play. The transitions between being in the scenario (or in the children’s play) and momentarily stepping out of it in order to discuss it and negotiate it (what if we did it this way instead) are necessary steps towards a credible and shared vision of an attractive future.

Towards the end of the situation, Libbeth’s approval, “okay it’s fine,” indicates to me that the discussion mode is over and she is getting ready to step back into the scenario. Simultaneously she orients herself away from the camera and me, and towards the children’s wardrobe and the prop representing a household mobile device, so that she can begin to send a message to them about the child.

From a facilitator’s perspective, this episode went really well. The physical and social context provided a rich backdrop for envisioning new services. However, staging everyday life is not always smooth sailing, as seen in Episode 2.

**Episode 2. Redefining a situation**

For a busy parent like Libbeth, it can be difficult to remember all the details of a child’s day. In this episode, we explore how reminders from the kindergarten staff can support parents in their everyday life. In a discussion with the kindergarten manager, Lisbeth explains her challenge:

“One child needs to bring sports clothes, the other and the third has to go to soccer training, and the fourth has other plans, and then you forget these things! That kind of message could be received. And possibly around 8:10 pm because then the kids are asleep, and that’s when I need a reminder about tomorrow’s activities such as returning the paper clip for photography in the kindergarten, or the extra boots and a packed lunch for the excursion.”

We decide to enact this particular situation to find out how Lisbeth could possibly interact with a service delivered on a mobile device in her home during the evening.

In this case, we are standing by the window in the kindergarten acting as if Lisbeth is at home. She sets the scene herself: “One has to prepare the lunches, and to prepare for the next day right? Who is doing what, and what sort of thing” Lisbeth starts the scenario by looking down at the prop in her hand, “That’s good, it must be the calendar package from Dte (the kindergarten manager), them I can prepare the dresses for tomorrow’s photography”. We shift the scene slightly to indicate that Libbeth moves to her children’s wardrobe, represented in the kindergarten by a box of children’s costumes. “Then I take this out (Libbeth holds up a pink dress). While I do the rest of the laundry, I’ll watch the news. And then we are ready for tomorrow’s photography.”

Watching the video of the scene later, I am reminded of the disaffection of the moment. The enactment could have worked better. Reflecting on the episode with colleagues at The Danish Design School, we speculate on the difference between this and other more successful episodes. It is somewhat stuff and not very convincing. We surely do not blame Lisbeth in any way, she did a fantastic job and tried hard to make it work. But rather, we look to our own role. In other projects, we have been successful with solitary participants in scenarios, but then it has always been in their own environments that provide many resources for acting consistently in the situation. The challenge is to evoke the sense of everyday life with a reflective twist.

In the scene with Libbeth, the facilitation and physical location appear to pose a hindrance: the kindergarten space is strongly coded for specific activities. We did not succeed in temporarily redefining it as a possible home environment. Thus, Libbeth could not draw on the immediate context for inspiration and synergy providing cues on how to move forward with her evening routines. All she had to work with was a window frame, the prop and a doll dress. Furthermore, it placed on Libbeth a very strong demand for acting that she was alone in the scene and had to drive the story through a monologue.

These reflections on the two episodes in the kindergarten enactments emerged as my fellow design researchers at The Danish Design School and I discussed parts of the video footage. The reflections were not merely analyses for theoretical production. Rather, they took place a few days before a similar enactment was planned, only this time with a focus on supporting the unem- plated in their plight to gain employment. How can we envision attractive mobile public services in the area of unemployment? From the enactment in the kindergarten, we identified two important adjustments: first, devote more attention to establishing a convincing relationship between the enactment and the meaning of the physical location. Second, move more explicitly away from a naturalistic fiction, where one pretend to really be in the future scenario. Instead we would make efforts to facilitate a more reflective fiction in which the boundary between acting in and reflecting on the scenario was more
blurred, for example by incorporating a meta discussion about the proposed design idea into the enactment itself.

Episode 3. Not pretending to be in the future

Today we have gathered in the job center of Elsmore. A sub group is getting ready to enact interactions with imagined mobile services between Philip, a recently laid-off economist, and Pernille, head of the job center. Line from 1508 produces the props as we progress, while I facilitate and record video. We have agreed to start the scenario where Philip has just left work after receiving the bad news of his new situation as unemployed. To set this scene we decide to leave the job center and go outside in a public square that is a central location in Philip’s story. “somewhere on Philip’s way home.”

We have decided on a good spot where Philip can sit and reflect about his new situation, while using his mobile device for browsing information services. The video camera is already recording in fact it has been running all the time. On my request that we are ready to enact the scenario, this short exchange defines the style of the enactment:

Line: “Shouldn’t I get out of the frame?”
Joachim: “No, that’s ok.”
Philip: “I don’t think it will be shown on the big screen…”
Joachim: “No, we’re not aiming for an Oscar!”

As a consequence, we can pretend that Philip is in the situation in which he has just become unemployed, even though Line is moving in and out of the frame in order to manipulate the props as needed. She provides rough sketches of an interface that provides the functionality implied by the course of action in the scenario. Line simply steps into the frame and adds the interface as a sticky note on the props that Philip and Pernille are holding whenever needed. Dramatically, this works to enhance the scenario, that is, to remind everybody that we are not staging real-life as such, we are playing with modes of reality. It reminds us that we are not acting in an entirely different story world of the future, but engaged in a reflective fiction about the world we are already positioned in. While everybody involved is allowed and encouraged to break from selected constraints of our existing lives, we are certainly not expected to apply our particular experience and expertise to develop the most relevant and interesting vision for a possible alternative.

Episode 4. Searching for people’s concerns

Twenty minutes later we have moved inside the job center to an office. Philip is skeptical about the ratio- nale of face-to-face meetings with an unemployment case officer. “Is it just a power thing where they want to check on me?”

However, Philip acknowledges that in his situation it would actually be of real value to meet with somebody who would truly back him up, motivate and support his sense of professional worthiness, a sense that can be declining during a period of unemployment. He envisioned part of an unemployment service that had to do with “constraining your sense of being competent and valuable, and that there are in fact jobs for you out there.” We agree to enact a face-to-face meeting where the imagined service could actually enhance the value of the meeting for both parties.

Here in the office, Pernille and Philip have not begun to enthusiastically list all the great things they could potentially accomplish with our imagined mobile service. I interrupt them, as I feel they are getting carried away with opportunities that are not being challenged nor supported by the particular situation we are currently in. They pause as I ask them to choose a specific situation to explore more in depth through enactment. The head of the job center is the first to suggest something:

Pernille: “How about a job offer with a wage subsidy?”
Philip: “(pauses) ‘Sure, let’s do that, why not.’”
Joachim: “(pauses) ‘Yes, if you believe in it, it has to come from the heart.’”
Philip: “I dunno a bit.”
Joachim: “Earlier you mentioned having a sick child.”
Philip: “Yes, we can do that; my child is to be hospitalized, and what does that mean for my job situation?”

After Pernille’s suggestion, I sensed a hesitation with Philip. Now that I look back on the footage where he accepted the suggestion after a short break, it appears to me that the scenario could probably have been completed with the first topic. However, I spontaneously chose to interrupt them in order to create a prolonged negotiation, a moment to increase the chances that Philip was really invested in the topic. Upon my suggestion to explore his situation of having a sick child, Philip was decid- edly more assertive when agreeing, as if he recognized this topic as a more credible role for himself.

This interpretation of Philip’s motives is of course speculative, but my impression is that Philip sees himself as a fully competent employee in the first place, and one that is not in need of wage subsidy to facilitate his employment—He is supported by the observation that he does not endorse any of the services that have to do with learning to become an employee” such as turning up to regular morning meetings at the job center.

In the end, Philip’s enthusiasm in the enacted scenario about his child to be hospitalized, despite his initially expressed feelings of being under societal supervision, is a strong sign of his commitment. The enacted scenario came closer to our ideal of an improved and reflective fiction based partly on the participants’ concerns and partly on the design possibilities offered by new mobile technologies.
The art of facilitating improvisational design performances involves many different aspects, probably above all acknowledging people’s highly different reasons for participating, and the strong attention that they bring to the context of what each participant aspires to achieve by way of the given design opportunity. These four brief episodes are meant to provide insight into some of the detailed interactions of enacting and improving future scenarios in context.

The main issue raised by the episode about redesigning a kindergarten situation as a home situation was the importance of the physical location for setting the scene convincingly. I have learned that, for this genre of improvised scenarios, the location is not something to be decided on after a design idea and a storyline have been developed. It worked much better to make an early decision about location, and then develop the storyline on the spot, where the surroundings provide rich resources for making up convincing interactions.

If a part of the story needs to take place in a location that is not immediately available, then a meeting room (which is often within reach) may be the best option for a location. Meeting rooms are specifically designed to provide a “common ground” for people with decidedly different interests. Thus, they lend themselves to be inhabited with new meaning more easily than for example a playing room of a kindergarten.

This type of redefining of the situation at hand as if it were something else, requires a large degree of language-based construction of reality. Through the dialogue between two competent participants within a common field (for example a parent and a kindergarten manager, or an unemployed citizen and a care worker) it is in fact possible to improvise both a stage such as “somewhere on Philip’s way home” and a convincing encounter with mobile services that do not in any functional sense exist yet. In the second episode with Lubich in “the home” we saw how challenging this was to accomplish with only one participant in front of the camera, and thus no dialogue.

In developing a convincing scenario, we wish to take full advantage of the potential that resides in the relations between the knowledgeable participants and the arrangement of the physical environment. As their interrelations are articulated and developed through improvised dialogue and action, a scenario may emerge. To achieve this we explicitly try to avoid a naturalistic fiction in which the participants “just act normally”, which, by the way, is extremely difficult even for trained actors of fiction. It clearly is not possible to “just act normally” when profound discussions about what a desirable normality might be are intertwined with the enactment itself (e.g. Philip’s skepticism of even meeting a care worker, during the actual meeting with one).

Instead of a highly scripted enactment in which the course of action is figured out beforehand and simply delivered through acting, the improvised and gradually emerging story of interactions sought for here implies being in the open, where very little is given, and very much depends on defining temporary overlaps in interest. To accomplish this, and let the situation develop, requires that we come prepared to embrace the unpredictable, and not cling on to preconceived notions of the good idea.

This particular genre of improvised design performance is about experimenting with different modes of being, not role play. A facilitator may jump in and fill the role of, for example, a passer-by who is required to accommodate the actions of the central participants. But an enacted scenario risks falling apart as soon as someone is taking on a role that person cannot fill; if he/she starts to pretend to be someone else is not. When Philip first accepted to enact a wage subsidiised job-offer, I think we were close to that.

The encounter between Philip and Pernille illustrates something that cut across all the improvised design performances I have experienced: The enactment of a possible future situation is deeply dependent on an authentic social encounter between individuals who invent themselves and their personal and professional concerns, however temporary or limited the compatibility of their concerns may be.

Fredrik Ericsson, ergonomist and researcher, Ergonomidesign, September 2009.

Advice for carrying out a FieldShop reportage

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Joachim Halse
Co-design is serious work for defining and solving problems. But co-design is also a playful exploration of possibilities. Prototyping brings together the sketching of new products and services with the imagining of a different everyday practice. Prototyping is acting out how a given idea could be experienced as meaningful, but the question remains, what happens if we take a step further? What if we take the theatrical metaphor even more seriously and think of design as everyday theater? And what if we think of co-designers as instructors, producers, scenographers and actors who have to warm up, rehearse and cool down for every “performance”?

We will start with a snapshot from a prototyping session at a shopping center at Bangs Torv. It is the third time shop owners, caretakers and local citizens are brought together by Herlev municipality and the team of DAIM researchers. From initial discussions on how shop owners informally take scrap light bulbs and useless second hand cloth from customers to the local sorting station, and how citizens and caretakers nurture the sense of neighbourhood in the square, everyone has been making doll scenarios at an evening workshop. Now it is time to take the dreams of an active waste recycling shopping square back to Bangs Torv where it all began.

We are gathered in one of the local shops. Quietly and attentively, we are looking at Allan, Ulla and Michael who have just shown us how, in the future, used batteries could be returned to a shop. We are waiting for a signal; Michael makes a gesture, and Joachim lowers his arm and turns off the camera. We applaud enthusiastically. We have really enjoyed the show! Like at the theater’s backstage, we are gathering and laughing and chatting casually with each other. It has been an exciting three hours. We, seven people who have only met each other twice before, have created different scenarios by building stories, finding the right place, deciding who was going to be a part of the story and preparing the props and roles. Even if there has been no physical stage, it is like we ourselves could see and experience it. Passers-by looked strangely at us trying to figure out what we were doing with cardboard boxes, a video camera and people moving around sometimes in a circle. But within the circle of participants, we knew; we had been rehearsing the future!

Design as performance?

What Allan, Ulla and Michael had just shown us completed an intense period of joint efforts. A novel concept for battery collection had come to life. A battery collector was present as a cardboard mock up that we had all discussed and made changes to. Yet as they started to improvise, a story emerged that was both compelling and fulfilling. What they did was not only a “trying out” of a product but also a performance of an imagined everyday practice in which this product was “alive”.

But what does this enactment mean? Are the participants acting as themselves? What do they gain by doing this? Why are they doing it in the middle of a sleepy shopping center? Do they have a script or are they improvising? Are they dressing up? Are they really serious?

Before getting deeper into these questions let us first dwell a little on the definition of a performance. In the theater performance, something is put on stage and acted out by actors, it has a beginning and an end that makes what is conveyed come to a state of completion. In the theater what is performed is usually “make-believe”, an enactment of an imaginary world in which a drama unfolds.

It is however not the imaginative itself that defines the performance. Also in our everyday activities, do we give small performances for one another. The American sociologist Erving Goffman talked about how we present ourselves in order to influence others by acting out a social role of rights and duties.
Among Goffman's examples are the waiter at a restaurant who performs his role in a carefully scripted way that lets the restaurant visitor understand what to expect and what not to expect. This role is far from identical to the roles the ordinary world and been “transported” to the ordinary world of the performer. When we recognize our own play-acting in performance in general in the sense that theater is never just an il-lusionary pastime but always connected to the drama of everyday life. Theatre only makes sense to us as an audience if we recognize our own play-acting in the play of the actors. At the same time, we do also get moved and transformed as we experience the performance. Similarly, to move ourselves from the world of everyday performances to the world of the staged drama is not as large a step as one might think. The playing and playfulness of children may not be in the foreground of adult life, but they are important to us as a way of rehearsing in large and small ways how to live our lives differently. To see design as performance is precisely to connect the multi-faceted role-playing of the everyday with the playful exploration of the “what-if” of the theater. Let us turn back to the citizens and shop staff at Bangs Torv to see their actions through the binoculars of the theater.

Transportation and transformation
The scenario that Allan, Michael and Ulla performed with us at Bangs Torv is in our view a little piece of everyday theater. It deals with what could happen among the very same people at the very same spot in case the new concept for battery collection was turned into reality. During the rough and simple cardboard mock-ups and the unusual set-up of four people standing around the three actors with a video camera, the play seemed very real and the inter-actions flowed smoothly with little hesi-tation. The actors were not “real” actors but theatrical performances in general in the sense that theater is never just an il-lusionary pastime but always connected to the drama of everyday life. Theatre only makes sense to us as an audience if we recognize our own play-acting in the play of the actors. At the same time, we do also get moved and transformed as we experience the performance. Similarly, to move ourselves from the world of everyday performances to the world of the staged drama is not as large a step as one might think. The playing and playfulness of children may not be in the foreground of adult life, but they are important to us as a way of rehearsing in large and small ways how to live our lives differently. To see design as performance is precisely to connect the multi-faceted role-playing of the everyday with the playful exploration of the “what-if” of the theater. Let us turn back to the citizens and shop staff at Bangs Torv to see their actions through the binoculars of the theater.

Schechner's cycle of transportation performance. The performer has left her ordinary world and been “transported” to somewhere, but dropped off where she entered. She has not been transformed or permanently changed.

Some of the designers had suggested placing a small container for collect-ing things for re-use very centrally at the square; Lillian objected strongly to this possibility. “This will not look nice, it will give us just the kind of problem with alcohols in the square that we had years ago” said Lillian. The designers were very eager to keep the container in play. They found it to be a valuable response to a different concern raised at the workshop on how to make recycling a visible and attractive part of the square. The discussion went back and forth and at a certain point Lillian's friend Ulla, joined in saying “well, Lillian remember we are only playing”. She went on to move around with her (cardboard) container and urged Lillian to engage with the playful “what if?”. Lillian went along and for some time the two were alternating between changing the stage and imagining what it would be like. Not unlike what is so obvious in childhood’s ways of playing, simultane-ously negotiating the rules and actually playing, these rehearsals gradually gave shape to a workable concept.

Play and imagination are closely connected. When we play, we allow ourselves to be "someone else" and we can do things to one another without the serious consequences it might have if we did them for real. This does not mean that playing is not serious. We really are "someone else" within the world of the play if it is playing to make any sense at all. Play and everyday drama is a kind of being in the borderland between the well known and the unknown. Like in medieval carnivals, such borderlands are important to release tensions but they are also sites for making new connections and new configurations. Rehearsals are a particular kind of playing. They are explorations, but they are also sites for making the perform-ance of social drama. This is not unlike designing. In designing, there is a need to explore the unknown and suspend criticism and disbelief, but there must also be a commitment to reaching a state of completion.
When prototyping new waste system for the shopping center, citizens, caretakers and shop owners gathered in the middle of their “everyday world”. It was important to find the right setting for the scenarios to unfold. Like any theater show, props were prepared and used in the rehearsals. “Backstage” a few meters from the scenario – the rest of the group followed the performance.