

## **Transition, Design, Care**

Ian Hargraves

I began writing this reflection on the idea of transition and design a while back. To set a case to ground reflection, I took time to recount the story of a woman that I sat with and observed her visit with a doctor. This was the story of the problems that this woman in the latter years of her life faced—problems both of illness and in inadequate medical attention to those issues. She faced problems of needs. Illness meant that needs that previously were routinely satisfied in her day-to-day life no longer are. Inadequate medical response and over-prescription of remedies had fragmented her world rather than integrated her journey as she lived out the closing years of her life.

I have this story neatly written but I am not sharing it here. I'm not sharing in light of another concern. A concern of rights. In writing up the story I was aware that I had completed the IRB mandated consent process that allowed me to join in the doctor and the patient's conversation. The IRB document which the patient had signed noted that in any reporting the identity of the patient would not be disclosed nor would any elements by which she might be identified. In writing I had followed the woman's right to remain anonymous. I spoke in generic terms of 'woman' and 'doctor'. I did not note her age beyond 'older' nor where she had travelled from to visit with the doctor. I shared what I had written with a colleague to check that the woman was successfully de-identified in the text. My colleague alerted me to another issue—the right of the woman not to surprisingly recognize herself in an account that was unknown to her. As I currently write I have not been successful in contacting the woman, and so I'm not including her story here so as to respect the woman's rights.

The purpose of the story for the upcoming gathering on Transition Design in Pittsburgh was to discuss the transition of design itself as integral to the transitions of sustainable futures. I would use the woman's story to illustrate the relation of design and care and the transitions in care (design) that serve in attending to the fragmentation of the woman in her life and living and prospectively as she

transitions in death. That story I won't share, but the theme remains. It remains even without the content of the story. The woman's story is predominately a story of needs, the challenge to sharing it is a challenge of rights. In approaching or opening up the issue of transition to sustainable futures we could do so through needs or we could do so through rights. Indeed, strong cases have been made for a needs-driven transition to a more sustainable world, while others have equally forcefully argued for sustainability as a rights-driven issue—a sustainable future is the right of future generations, or sustainability is the right of the non-human members of this planet or of the planet itself. Needs and rights are obviously an important part of the conversation, but they may not be all that matters. Mattering itself may be an important trope in figuring sustainable futures.

If mattering is an important trope then it will be timely. It will be part of the current transitions made intentionally to re-member (bring back into membership/participation) the fragments and fragmentation of the present. The arguments made in response to the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson Missouri point in this direction. *Black Lives Matter* is not the same argument that Black communities are in need or that the right to be treated fairly by law enforcement extends to African Americans. The fragmentation of Ferguson and the argument made in response is of people held within systems in which they do not matter, or in which they do not adequately matter. In this argument Michael Brown was dis-membered—removed from membership of a world in and by which he mattered—long before he was shot.

The argument for sustainable futures need not be an argument for overcoming the wealth of need and the complex interconnected tangles that this need has currently generated in the world—although this argument is important and should continue to be pursued. Sustainable futures need not be argued for as the rights of the planet, the non-human, or future generations—although there is much that is compelling and positive in these arguments. The argument for sustainable futures may also be made as an argument that mattering runs throughout the system of the world/cosmos. The planet matters, Michael Brown matters, the woman I sat with in her visit with her doctor matters, their conversation matters. Systemic

fragmentation is a dis-memberment of part and whole in which what we take to be part and whole is reduced in its mattering.

In this line of thinking the question of action—what we are calling Transition Design—is how do we participate in mattering? Design itself transitions as we adopt a consciousness of mattering. If, for example, we accept that people matter, then Human-Centered Design, considers how we participate in the mattering of people. If the planet matters, design for sustainability considers how we participate in the mattering of the planet. In mattering, design transitions from a *capacity* to induce change, produce artifacts, or to work the materials of communication, industrial or interaction design. Design becomes a mode of *participation*.

We might turn to philosophy and metaphysics to expand this issue of mattering, but we need not. It is also a practical matter suited to design, and an experiential matter of everyday life—we live our lives as it matters, we feel that those close to us also matter, and that mattering extends to the environments in and by which we live. We participate in something as mattering when we *care* about that something.

Care is useful in our current discussion for distinguishing design as a capacity to induce change from design as a mode of participation. I find an ancient myth useful as a vision of the transitions of design present in the shift from capacity to participation.

*As Care (Cura) was crossing a river, she thoughtfully picked up some mud and began to fashion a human being. While she was pondering what she had done, Jupiter<sup>1</sup> came along. Care asked him to give the spirit of life to the human being, and Jupiter readily granted this. Care wanted to name the human after herself, but Jupiter insisted that his name should be given to the human instead. While Care and Jupiter were arguing, Terra<sup>2</sup> (Earth) arose and said that the human being should be named after*

---

<sup>1</sup> Jupiter was the founder of Olympian society, a society of the major gods and goddesses who inhabited Mount Olympus after most of the gods had already appeared.

<sup>2</sup> The original life force of the earth, guided Jupiter's rise to power.

her, since she had given her own body. Finally, all three disputants accepted Saturn<sup>3</sup> as judge. Saturn decided that Jupiter, who gave spirit to the human, would take back its soul after death; and since Terra had offered her body to the human, she should receive it back after death. But, said Saturn, "Since Care first fashioned the human being, let her have and hold it as long as it lives." Finally, Jupiter said, "Let it be called homo,<sup>4</sup> since it seems to be made from humus (Latin for earth).<sup>5</sup>

This myth is useful for the current discussion as it is an account of design, the human, and transition. The myth begins with a designer, Care. I say designer because in the first sentence the Goddess Care is presented as a thoughtful fashioner—a fashioner of a human being. This designing, or thoughtful fashioning takes place as she crosses a river—long a symbol of change, flux, or transition. The issue of design and transition is opened up further in the rest of the myth, which has two parts. In the first part of the myth, the care that we recognize as design is opened up in conflict between several gods—each of whom might be thought of as representing the capacities of design, or design as a capacity. First into the conflict is Jupiter. If Care in the first part of the myth is a thoughtful fashioner, Jupiter is the spirited designer who says that well-made is not enough. Design should also animate, enliven. The designer, Jupiter brings the capacity to enliven. Out of this capacity he seeks to have the object of design (the human being in this case) named after himself. Terra then joins the dispute. Terra is also a designer, one who works from an intimate understanding of materials. Indeed it is these materials that the Goddess Terra claims as laying behind the capacity to create the object of design. In

---

<sup>3</sup> Known for his devotion to fairness and equality, Saturn was the son of Terra and the father of Jupiter.

<sup>4</sup> Latin for human being

<sup>5</sup> The Myth of Care comes to us from Hyginus 1 B.C.E. He is not the originator of this myth, its origins are unknown. Rather Hyginus is a Roman schoolboy whose notes yield a record of lost stories. The version of the myth reproduced here is a close adaptation taken from:

Reich, Warren T. "The History of the Notion of Care." In *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, edited by Warren T. Reich. New York, London: Macmillan Pub. Co. : Simon & Schuster Macmillan ;Prentice Hall International, 1995.

The Myth of Care found expression as Sorge in Goethe's Faust. The Myth also appears in the middle of Heidegger's *Being and Time* as a precursor is his development of *Dasein*. Care remains a foundational concept throughout Heidegger's philosophy.

For more on the history of the Myth of Care see:

Reich, Warren T. "The History of the Notion of Care." In *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, edited by Warren T. Reich. New York, London: Macmillan Pub. Co. : Simon & Schuster Macmillan ;Prentice Hall International, 1995.

Boff, Leonardo. *Essential Care : An Ethics of Human Nature*. Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2008.

contemporary design, Terra represents design science—the claim that scientific understanding of material and process is the ground of practice.

The second part of the myth begins with Saturn and his deliberation. Saturn's deliberation does not center on the capacities of the competing designer gods—thoughtful fashioner, spirited animator, material and processes. Saturn turns to the object of design—the human. Saturn determines the place of the gods in relation to the human, rather than settles which capacity to design ultimately lays claim on the human. In this turn towards the human as mattering ahead of the capacity of design, the designer gods transition, they find their place in relation to the human as mattering.

How do we see this transition in design? The most remarkably change is with the designer Care. At the myth's close we understand Care not as a powerful agent of change but as designer who has found her place in relation to human life and living. What matters in design is no longer the capacity to thoughtfully fashion, the guiding concern of design is the having and holding of the human in life. This having and holding in life is a thematic variation of Transition and Sustainability. Transition, with its emphasis on change, reminds us that the goal of a sustainable future is not to return to an idealized past or an idealized nature. Nor is it to maintain the present or prevent the present from deteriorating further. The goal of transition design is to participate in the having and holding of beings as mattering as they transition through the courses of their lives—as person or as planet. To sustain life as mattering even as that life changes, and ultimately dies.

It is not only the designer Care that transitions in the second part of the myth. In the first part of the Myth Jupiter is the god who insists that *'his name should be given to the human'*. In the second part, Jupiter ends the myth saying generously *'Let it be called homo'*. The capacity to initiate and animate a claim on the human being is transformed. It is a transition from the capacity to insist that *'this matters'*, which is ultimately a capacity to claim that *'I or we matter'*, to a voice that speaks to what in the situation matters—to turn away from animating belief and self interest. The transition of Jupiter has implications for the treatment of vision in transition design. Vision is the vehicle of animation in design. It serves to motivate, energize and

persuade. The history of design is also a history of mis-animations and harmful visions. Transition design requires more of design than the capacity to envision. It requires us to set vision in the context of the having and holding of the human in life. To develop a vision that participates in life rather than insists that this is what life must be. It is worth considering in the second part of the myth that the return of spirit to Jupiter at death is a reminder that that which animates us has a life—that our visions of the future are and should be mortal. The purpose of vision is not to establish what must be, but to sustain us as we move to new vision and new participation in Life.

There are signs too that the goddess Terra also transitions in the second part of the myth. We do not hear from Terra directly as we did in the first part. In the first part Terra demands that the human be named after her material contribution. The second part closes with Jupiter saying *'Let it be called homo, since it seems to be made from humus'* The change from Terra to homo/humus is a change in matter from mute material to mattering. In the context of transition design we approach material not as matter but as mattering—reminiscent of the distinction of universe and cosmos.

The Myth of Care is a helpful view into design organized not by its own internal capacities (as it often is at the current time) but as it participates in an object of design that matters—in this case the human being. It offers places for exploring the transitions of design implicated in the change of consciousness from capacity to participation.