

# Upon opening the black box of participatory design and finding it filled with ethics

Nordes 2011 Conference

**Marc Steen**

Senior scientist at TNO (research and innovation)

Email: [marc.steen@tno.nl](mailto:marc.steen@tno.nl)

TNO: [www.tno.nl](http://www.tno.nl)

Marc: [www.marcsteen.nl](http://www.marcsteen.nl)

## **Goal of this presentation**

To explain the title of my paper

## Goal of this presentation

To argue that PD has ethical qualities, and to explore three forms of ethics to understand the ethics—or *ethos*—of PD.

To explore how ‘making ethics explicit’ can help to ‘update’ PD and make it (more) relevant in our current time.

- › Critique on STS: lack of attention for ethics
- › As shift in PD: from politics to ethics
- › What I mean with ‘ethics’ ... three forms
- › Ethics-of-the-other; Pragmatist ethics; **Virtue ethics**
- › **Virtue ethics as a perspective to understand PD**
- › Virtues: Cooperation, Curiosity, Creativity, Care, Reflexivity
- › ‘Implications for design’

## Critique on STS: lack of attention for ethics

In 'Upon opening the black box and finding it empty', Langdon Winner (1993) expressed discontent with the many studies in the field of science and technology studies (STS) that discuss technology without addressing moral questions.

He appreciated that STS-ers—with their empirical studies of the ways in which people practically develop and apply technology—'*opened the black box and showed a colorful array of social actors, processes and images therein*', but criticized their approach because '*the box they reveal is still a remarkably hollow one*'. Many STS scholars neglect, ignore or steer away from ethical questions.

**A response to Winner's plea to pay more attention to ethics.**

## A shift in PD: from politics to ethics

Based on a review of key PD projects, Bjerknes and Bratteteig (1995) argued that:

*'All the projects in the 70's had an explicit political bias in wanting to change the preconditions for system development ... The **political** system developer is an emancipator, carrying out an action programme to give the weak parties knowledge they can use to increase their power.'*

*'From the middle 80's, the quest for democracy was left to the individual system developer', whose responsibility 'changed towards being a facilitator of a morally ... 'correct' system development process ... The **ethical** system developer is mainly responsible towards their own individual ethical codex.'*

## What I mean with 'ethics' ... three forms

Focus on micro-scale practices (Van de Poel and Verbeek 2006), e.g. PD participants' ... focus on three aspects, using three lenses:

1. ... ways of interacting with each other and with users—  
*ethics-of-the-other*; Levinas, Derrida; face-to-face encounters;
2. ... ways of organizing research and design processes—  
*pragmatist ethics*: Dewey: organizing processes; and
3. ... thoughts and feelings, choices and actions—  
*virtue ethics*: Aristotle: character and dispositions (politics > ethics)

## Design thinking: problem/solution in parallel

My exploration is organized around the notion of *design thinking*: concerned both with exploring and articulating *problems* and with exploring and developing *solutions*, as intertwined processes, organized as iterative processes (Cross 2006; Lawson 2006)

Two elements (or moves):

- › ***developing knowledge and generating ideas***, e.g. when studying the problem or articulating a problem definition (outside-in); and
- › ***making decisions and creating things***, e.g. when developing and trying-out possible solutions for the problem (inside-out).

## Summary

|   | <i>Developing knowledge and generating ideas</i>   | <i>Making decisions and creating things</i>   |
|---|--|---|
| <i>Ethics-of-the-other—encounters, face-to-face</i> | Tendency to <i>grasp</i> the <i>other</i> . Attempt to welcome the <i>other</i> (desire) | Tendency to <i>program</i> invention. Attempt to welcome <i>otherness</i> (passivity) |
| <i>Pragmatist ethics—processes, proj. mngt</i>      | Joint inquiry, with <i>perception</i> , sharing of experiences and empathy               | Joint inquiry, with <i>conception</i> , cooperation and joint learning                |
| <i>Virtue ethics—character, thoughts, feelings</i>  | Cultivate an appropriate form of <i>curiosity</i>  | Cultivate an appropriate form of <i>creativity</i>                                    |



## Virtue ethics as a perspective to understand PD

Virtue ethics: Draws from Aristototle and made popular by MacIntyre's '*After Virtue*' in academia, and by 'art of living' popular literature:

- › a focus on PD participants' **character and dispositions**, thoughts and feelings, choices and actions;
- › the goal of virtue ethics is to increase people's **well-being** and to create a **just society**;
- › to do very good what one is good at—to be **virtuoso**—to cultivate one's character and dispositions;
- › to aim for an appropriate **middle**, depending on the specific circumstances (e.g. courage)

## Explore some relevant virtues

- › **Cooperation**
- › **Curiosity**
- › **Creativity**
- › **Care or empowerment**
- › **Reflexivity**

Drawing concepts from the Nordic PD tradition—not prescribing any ‘rules’; just reading what is written about PD—and mentioning some examples from practice—*please note that this is ‘work in progress’...*

## Cooperation

- › Between designers and users in a 'third space' (Muller 2002)
- › Between different disciplines: Like a jazz group (Bratteteig and Stolterman 1997)
- › Middle: Between **too much top-down** management and **too little care** for the dynamics and subtleties—cooperation with appropriate levels of **trust** and **transparency**
- › *Example: Go walk outside collectively, when the project is really busy (and close laptops, please)*

## Curiosity

- › Mutual learning, between designers and users (Florence)
- › ‘Fieldwork’: Ethnography, empathic design, contextual design
- › Middle: Between **overly curious, disrespectful** towards others and **indifference** towards others—curiosity **in-between** people (not within one)
- › *Example: Talk about users with respect and with appropriate words (not stereotyping)*

## Creativity

- › E.g. Future Workshops (Critique, Fantasy, Implementation)
- › Cooperative prototyping between designers and users (Utopia)
- › Middle: Between **obsession with one's own ideas** and **interrupting** creative process—creativity **in-between** people (not within one)
- › *Example: Calmly negotiate, when technology is difficult (quality, time, budget)*

## Care or empowerment

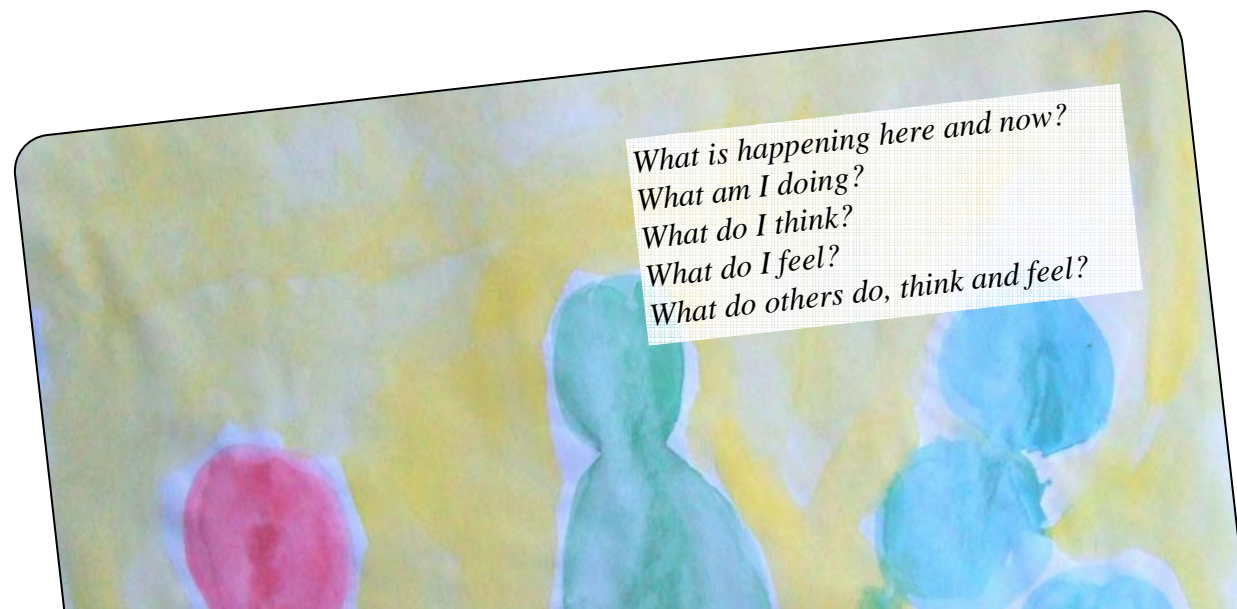
Cooperation, curiosity and creativity are related to PD practitioners' and *their* flourishing. They also want to 'do good' to *others*—to *care*—to *empower* others to *flourish* and to create a just society.

- › *Tool perspective* (Utopia): To empower people to cultivate tacit knowledge and skills, and to help shape the tools which they will use
- › *Transformation design* (Burns et al., 2006): To enable an organization to innovate continuously ('building capacity, not dependency')
- › *Reflective design* (Sengers et al., 2005): Make artefacts that make people think about what they are doing
- › Middle: Between **too much** direction and **too little** direction

## Reflexivity

Reflexivity: Reflection one's own roles and actions in PD, similar to consciousness or mindfulness.

Reflexivity is needed to become *virtuoso*: to transform 'natural' desires—to cooperate, to be curious and to be creative, to care for others—into well-formed forms of these desires—to *flourish*



## ‘Implications for design’

Design **practices**: for managers: *cooperation and care—and reflexivity*;  
for other participants: *cooperation, curiosity and creativity—and  
reflexivity*

Design **research**: plan for empirical research in *WeCare* project

Design **education**: Ideas of, e.g., Bucciarelli (2007), Lloyd and Van de  
Poel (2008)

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