

SCIENCE ALMIGHTY!

The "fictional-scientist" as experimental Aufklärer.

Proposal for a narrative workshop organizing new "science communication" models based on the fictional self-portraiture of the scientist in a world transformed by his/her research.

"Wissenschaft denkt nicht"

Martin Heidegger

Since the late twentieth century, a growing number of participatory projects involving citizens in scientific research has produced surprisingly efficient results. From bird watching to astronomy, conservation and health care, "normal humans" have helped gather giant datasets, and deployed new participatory interfaces between scientific institutions and society. If this new exchanges let us learn a lot about the citizen-scientist, the *scientist-citizen* remains a character to be investigated. What kind of social creature are women and men of science? How do *scientists* and *researchers* participate in the world of human affairs? Why does this seem to be an odd question, and why should we care to ask it?

The Scientist as citizen

If knowledge is power, Science is magic. Until the climate crisis, it has rarely has mingled with politics. How conscious are scientists of the potential disruptive nature of their research? If everything the scientist investigates, publishes, enables and transforms becomes sooner or later a matter of societal concern, scientists and technologists should consider themselves as "meta-citizens" imbued with some kind of super-powers; - in other words: *great responsibilities*.

As science keeps transforming the world, new kinds of knowledge circulation processes reformulate what it means to be a citizen in today's information society. Despite the promising prospects of "citizen-science", it remains difficult to imagine how citizens and scientists could possibly "co-evolve" to engage in new interactions, create new hybrid roles and find different political agency in tomorrow's world. How will these two protagonists of the modern world interact in this newly globalized, climate-stressed "megaPolis"; - and how will they collaborate to rescue humanity from it's own fate?

It may be worth imagining new ways for scientists and citizens to encounter each other, and engage in the co-evolution of their shared societal environment. Geared with their unique investigative perspectives, tools and resources, scientists could be (even) more valuable to "the rest of us", if they found a way to "open (their) science" to a new range of questions. Will we ever get a chance to "co-discover", understand and debate the implications of their current scientific research? If yes, how should we go about it?

The fictional scientist and "scientist-fiction".

Pop culture and sci-fi stories are crowded with archetypal scientist characters: the nerd prodigy discovering quantum gates in his kitchen, the evil genius misusing his findings to enslave humanity, the paranoid virologist warning the world of an impending disaster, or the freaky astronomer making contact with alien life...All belong to the 20th century's pantheon.

If we look beyond these clichés, we may use their playfulness to actually ask scientists what kind of *people* they could become, if they could change the world *according to what they know*. What if we gave them the power to change it all? What if they possessed unlimited economic and political agency? What if they were the Queens and Kings of a world they would not only seek to understand, but also transform and re-design?

If the scientist-citizen was suddenly a monarch, a minister president, or a benevolent ruler, if s/he was a tyrant, a megalomaniac venture capitalist, or a terrorist, we could get to know how to

Perhaps would we discover a lot more about their research object if we saw it "fictionalized" in the world, than if we simply asked scientists to *explain* us the paper they just published in a journal. Science communication is not just about explaining things difficult to understand, It's also about researching both how science discovers, - and how it discovers itself as a force in everyone else's will have to cope with.

A way to find out about it would be to ask them how they would rule, - to tell us tales of power. This is nothing new about storytelling science, but what's different here is that we'd like to ask scientists to reinvent themselves. We're not interested in the usual "storyfied" science communication gesture, no, we'd like to hear stories about ***a world transformed by their own research***. If we asked scientists to invent stories about their own future, if we asked them to save the world (or to destroy it), what would we hear?

This is what we suggest to do in this *creative writing and picturing workshop* designed for Scientists and researchers willing to engage with the world differently. We're looking at this fictionalizing process as a new kind of "open science": exploring new pathways between science and society through the fictionalized figure of the scientist.

"Researching research" in times of epistemic doubt.

From the "end of aging" to space holidays on Mars, science and technology keep promising better tomorrows. In the past ten years, it felt as if technology was running the show, deploying the grand narrative of a future re-enchanted by machines, robots, drones, artificial intelligence and bio-engineering.

We may still expect science to address the biggest challenges of our times, from pandemics to climate crisis, but we've learned new ways to doubt the benevolent nature of progress in the light of the past century's troubled history. It's not just the atomic bomb and nuclear plants we're tempted to blame science for. Martin Heidegger once said: "wissenschaft denkt nicht".

Without digging in the complexities of his argument, we may just remind ourselves that Science, once again, will not tell us how to live. It may attempt to survive itself, but it still won't tell us how to live. If scientists eventually rescue us from a climate crisis they helped generate in the first place, they will need more than their own genius to accomplish this grand mission. They will need political and public support. They will need consensus to avoid fracturing the public opinion. In times of fake news and conspiracy theories, science will have to come up with new stories. It will have to come up with new kinds of "constructions", with new "*truth-telling lies*": It will need new forms of debates.

Post-modernism has long been deconstructing the enlightenment's promise, along with the kind of humanism it was putting forth. If humans are no longer central to the world they are meant to inhabit, they're still the only species capable to rescue the life support system they've helped destroy in the first place. Science, one may be tempted to say, created the problems it is trying to resolve. These would not have existed in the first place, one may fancy to think, should scientists have practiced "second-order perspicacity" to explore the *implications* of their own findings: if they had explored their discoveries with the speculative inquisitiveness of a science-fiction writer, an essayist, or an activist. This project is about expanding the role of the scientist by inviting them to *research their own research*, and rediscover their own engagement the human world they are part of.