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Hello, thank you for inviting me to speak at design dialogs. This morning I'll be trying to cover a lot of ground, if I don't go on for too long we should be able to get through it. I want to start today by talking about these times we live in. I'll then go on to explain how I see the designers role in this time as a facilitator, and finish up with a few case studies from my own work and others.

<slide>What is the slogan for now?</slide>

<slide>Show, don't tell</slide>

It is easy to think that we live in a time of showing and not telling (or 'demonstrate to communicate' or 'practice, not theory' or Lunenfeld's 'Demo or Die'.) With the wider availability of media creation tools and the internet as a medium for delivery, people of all skill levels are creating representations of their ideas and putting them out there for the world to react to. This is in contrast to having an interesting idea and writing about it. From the blogger Brunkalla putting a video camera in a rocket and then creating a video to a Radio Head song with the footage; to the ACLU creating it's *Pizza* web video illustrating a possible future of total information awareness; to the *Epic 2014* future history which raise hard to comprehend questions about the quality of future journalism (Googlezon) in a world where everyone news is overly personalized to them. Examples of demonstrating to communicate abound.

All of these pieces create an excitement and instant emotional understanding that is easier and quicker to digest then they might have been if they where written. The 'show don't tell' mantra foregrounds both the ability of showing to be an effective communication tool and

the creators new found ability to create. At the same time it references the decline of written criticism.

<slide>~~Show, don't tell~~</slide>

Unfortunately, 'show don't tell' isn't perfect. I'll go over this in greater detail when I get to case studies, but in the last seven years there has been an explosion of writing in the video game world not a decline. If we were only trying to explain current trends in design practices, or trends in communication 'show don't tell' would be fine, but I believe that this is only a part of our current condition. What 'show don't tell' fails to encompass is the broader trends like crafting, which I feel is just as important to understanding our time.

<slide>Create, don't consume</slide>

This slogan encompasses both the spirit of demonstration as communication and the ongoing craze with DIY and crafting. Since the millennium knitting, modifying clothing, and home projects (to name a few examples) have been very popular (machine projects classes often sell out.) Some saw this as a trend toward frugality, but in truth these projects often cost their makers more than if they had just gone out and bought the equivalent item. When I was an MDP student, Syuzi Pakhchyan, wrote a great thesis on the culture of crafting and her attempts to bring electronics into that world. This kind of creation is about being an individual, showing an appreciation of the act of making or more generally deploying and identity as someone who is not caught up in the mass of mass culture.

<slide>~~Create, don't consume~~</slide>

There are problems with this, of course. The artist versus consumer dichotomy, or the related idea that every interaction must be mediated by money and that to not follow this, is an act of rebellion feels very post-modern and therefore out of date. (In particular I'm

thinking of the first hour of *Wings of Desire* where almost no-one has a conversation that is not about money.) It also fails to explain why so much of the user created content on the internet is not very creative at all. In fact, most of it is little more than auto documentation of peoples lives.

<slide>Be the observed, not the observer</slide>

Now we are getting close. This captures the performative nature of 'show don't tell' and suggest the active component of 'create, don't consume' while recognizing the trend toward autobiographical work. It even sits nicely with post 9/11 ideas of a surveillance culture (in particular Jordan Krandel's ideas of new systems of observation and how we see ourselves because of them) and pre 9/11 infatuations with reality TV. But it has two weaknesses. First, the language is far too much like postmodernism's voyeurism vs. exhibitionism and obsession with the gaze. Second, what is striking about what people put online about themselves is how little it is like *America's funniest home videos*, or amateur porn, or reality TV.

<slide>~~Be the observed, not the observer~~</slide>

If you type 'mentos and diet coke' into Google videos you will find over 70 videos of people creating geysers of coke by dropping mentos into two litter bottles. If this was about making something cool to pass around the internet there would only need to be about 3 of them. If it was about documenting people's daily lives, then there probably shouldn't be any because who does this sort of thing. The truth is these videos, and peoples blogs and flickr accounts, serve not as snapshots of typical daily life, or creative self expressions (though they can be either), what they are, are postcards from peoples lives of their achievements, both large and tiny, memorialized in digital form. They are markers that say "I'm out here, I'm doing things, I have value, I can be creative or interesting or sexy."

<slide>What is the slogan for now?</slide>

<slide>Do. Do not, not do.</slide>

This sums it up well. Show, create, be seen... Do. It matches both with the explosion in personal media creation, the trend towards creating demonstrative pieces and crafting. 'Do. Do not, not do' captures Sean Dockray's sentiment that we live in a "zietgiest of doing." (yes he actually said zeitgeist.) Sean also mentioned Michael Speaks who when speaking about revolutions of technology from the late '90s said:

<slide> "One of the most relevant changes for design in this period occurred with a new relationship between thinking and doing that emerged with new forms of prototyping. Whether through scenario planning, product rapid prototyping or digital spreadsheet modeling, prototypes were no longer considered final products but means of thinking by doing." — Michael Speaks</slide>

<slide>Design as research (its about doing)</slide>

As member of the MDP I'm sure you are all aware of design as research. I only bring it up here, to point out its connection with doing and how well it fits into our times. Design as research is a process that encourages not an over intellectualization of a problem but rather, the constant working on a problem; taking data and expressing it in a variety of ways. Exploring both what you want to communicate and the opposite of what you want to communicate. Design as research, as a process, assumes that the best results come from doing design on a problem, not using design to solve a problem. Design as research is an active process, where the designer performs with a problem to find the answer, often surprising themselves in the process. As Mike Mills said to my class when I was taking design dialogues "Christopher Columbus is my hero, because he thought he was going one way but ended up somewhere much better."

<slide>Designers are generalists</slide>

The end of the twentieth century saw the nearly complete fracturing of all fields into narrower and narrower specialties. In the last 10 years designers and architects have been allowed to break that trend and become generalists once again. The entire idea of a 'media designer' is that of a designer who is not bound to a particular specialty but who can move between media as the work warrants. The career of Mike Mills offers a good example of architects who design sculptures, museum exhibits or use graphic design to explore architecture.

<slide>Web 2.0 (I know it's old news now)</slide>

Here in 2011 it is hard to imagine, but before Web 2.0 sites (the first being personal blog services) the web was a one-way medium for any user without the special knowledge of coding HTML or access to online space. Web 2.0 changed that by allowing users to upload content from within their browsers. Blogs, flickr.com, and youtube.com are all sites where the user uploads their own content, the site does the hard work of coding and formatting, and user ends up with their content online without leaving their browser. This removed the cumbersome step of using an external program or having special knowledge. It was this simplification that allowed the documentary part of the culture of Doing to spread quickly online. It was a revolution of this sort that I tried to find in my thesis work.

<slide>Video games</slide>

At the time I began being active in the game world, there were many artists making work around games. Mark Allen from Machine Project, created games that took place in the gallery space. His work and that of Sean and Fiona, explored the games in terms of adding interaction to the gallery or by exploring what games mean in our culture. Their work was about art and culture, not experimenting with games for games sake. Unlike them, I was interested in expanding what games could be in the context of games.

<slide> Writing games, or rather writing about games</slide>

As I eluded to earlier, while in general writing and theory was out of style, game writing was exploding.

<slide> “For the first few decades of interactive game design we were able to blithely ignore many of the larger meta-questions surrounding our craft while we slowly, painfully learned to walk. Now for the first time we are starting to see serious interest in what we do from the academic side. This is forcing those of us in the games industry to stop and consider, “What is this new medium that we're working in?” — Will Wright, intro to: *A Theory of fun in game design*. </slide>

*Rules of play* and *A theory of fun in game design* are just two book in an avalanche of writing about games that started just after the millennium. Then general premise of many of these books are:

<slide> “... despite the breathtaking pace of recent technical and commercial advancement, games have remained creatively stunted. On the one hand, there is a sense of boundless potential, the much-discussed possibility that games could succeed film as the defining form of popular culture for the new century. On the other hand, there is the reality of the game store — endless racks of adolescent power fantasies, witless cartoon characters, and literal-minded sports simulations.” —intro to: *Rules of play* </slide>

<slide>Modding and Machinema</slide>

Since the mid '90s many games have shipped with level editors. These let players create their own new content in a very 'web 1.0' kind of way. That is to say, by using complex external programs that require special knowledge. Many great Mods have been made, including

completely new games that have become successful in their own right. Concurrently people have been using the game itself to create new content in the form of movies, or machinema. Here the goal is not to create a new game but a video of characters acting out parts. Microsoft understands the interest Halo players have in the machinema sub culture and heightened Halo's ability to be used in this way.

<slide>Is there more?</slide>

If games where any other medium this would seem good enough: there are tools for creating new games, and tools for exploiting games to create personal expression. However, unlike non-interactive media like film, books, TV or radio, games have a potential for users to create (to Do) within the context of the game. Like 'web 2.0' can there be a space for user to demonstrate, create, document, Do, or otherwise own some new experience inside of a game? Can a game be about the experience the player creates not what the designer made?

<slide>My Thesis and other works</slide>

Those are the questions I've tried to answer in my work. From my thesis onward I have been looking for and finding methods that allow users to be in control of their experience while playing games I've made. I have not made fully open-ended simulations, though. I value the work of Will Wright (*SimCity*, *The Sims*, *Spore*) but feel that his games often feel like Photoshop with reactive elements. Wright sacrifices story and rich interaction for breadth. I've tried to find a way to have rich interaction in a narrower world but not a wrote one by any means.

I've seem to of gone on for too long. So I'll stick around if you have any questions, but otherwise I guess we're done.

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