
Felipe

Commons-based digital: Inclusion by default

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ESR 4

Inclusion by default

Since joining OpenDoTT, my work has sought to blur boundaries of exclusion. In other words, I did not go about creating solutions and only then presenting them to an external audience or expected users. Instead, my work has engaged openly with potential stakeholders from the onset.

That choice inspired the proto-concept of a *spiral of openness* in an earlier phase. When transported to literacy and inclusion, this perspective unfolds into new discussions.

*Who should be included in discussions about waste prevention in cities and regions?
Who is entitled to influence emerging technologies created for that matter?*



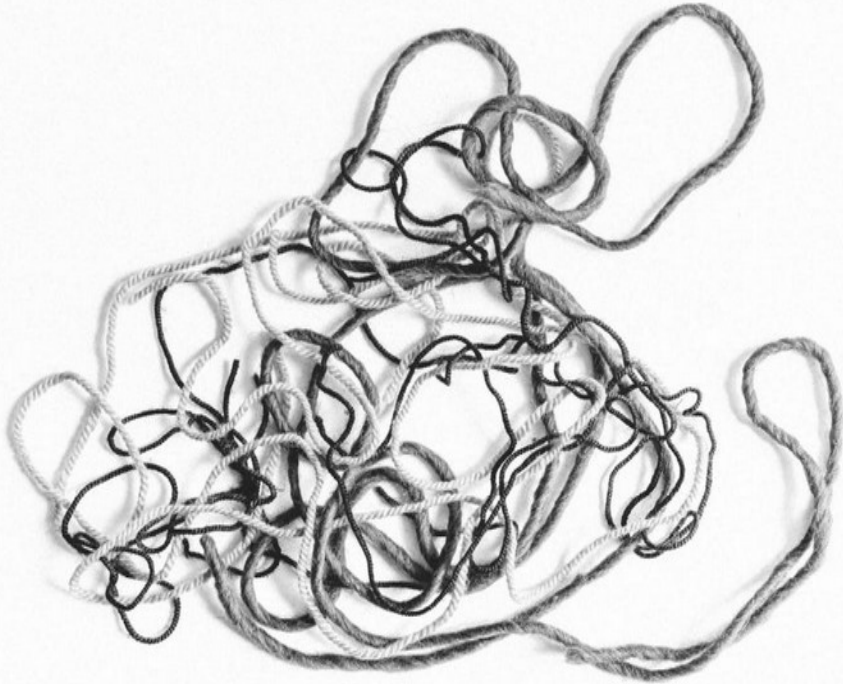
Technology is not a monolith. It is usually composed of multiple layers of knowledge applied to fulfil different human needs.



Disentangling technologies

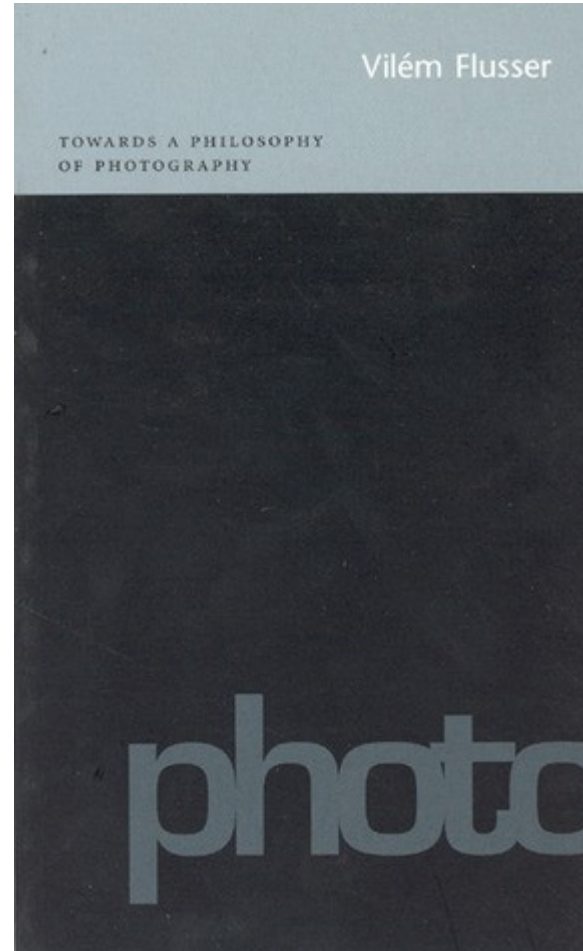
Some authors that help expand the understanding of the limits of science-arts-technology as usually understood by the general public:

- [Bruno Latour](#) demonstrates the extent to which science/technology owes its accomplishments to the scientific method as well as to power, luck, and even mistakes.
- [Richard Barbrook](#) points to the narrow - and loud - ideological stance behind startup culture and its imaginary futures (a take widely shared by director [Adam Curtis](#) on his documentary series All Watched over by Machines of Loving Grace).
- [Gilbert de Simondon](#) says that the technical object does not lie outside culture. To Simondon, technologies should be understood not only along the lines of their objective characteristics and use but as potential aesthetic objects and consequently full of meaning.



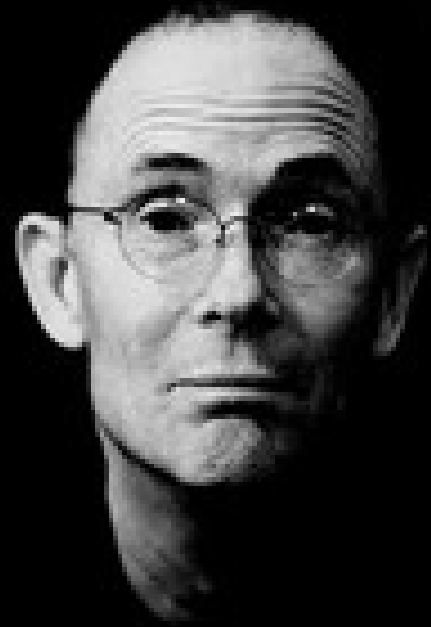
Undetermined

[Vilém Flusser](#) proposes that photographers are not mere passive users of their cameras. Instead, they would be in an eternal game to explore and overcome the limitations of that technology. It is not as though the camera manufacturer was inviting photographers to provide feedback on their inventions. Rather, it is important to understand that the use is not predetermined by the manufacturer.



“The street finds its own uses for things.”

— William Gibson



Mozilla: inclusion for empowerment

It is essential to consider a broad understanding of inclusion in tech. To summarise: there are a series of factors outside the realm of science (and economy) influencing the development of technologies; they are related to other types of knowledge; these forms of knowledge should be acknowledged, diversified and leveraged in technological development.



21st Century Skills

- Problem-Solving
- Communication
- Creativity
- Collaboration

Inclusion should not be only about converting people into new users/consumers of digital technologies the way they were originally designed, or even the same way more privileged groups already use them.

From the same perspective, literacy should go beyond replicating how those groups understand and use things, and discuss the situated relevance of technologies. These are **21st Century Skills**, as defined by the Mozilla Foundation.

“People know what they want. But people want what they don’t know too.”

Gilberto Gil,
former Brazilian Ministry of Culture.



Beyond inclusion

Even people who refuse to have internet-connected devices are subject to a reality managed by digital technologies and policies. One's personal data, health records, tax details, school attendance, and voting in elections - are growingly recorded and managed in data centres somewhere in the world.

Perhaps more explicit in everyday life, social interaction is increasingly moving to digital media and taking along socially constructed concepts of truth, fairness and participation. The challenges and dangers are plenty and much more complex than simply bringing more people to a predefined game with known rules.

Critical appropriation is paramount.

Commons-based equality

A commons-based approach should be pursued throughout the development of technologies, not after their purposes and affordances have already been ascribed.

In the activities performed for my PhD research, the design concepts are but triggers to expose assumptions, not prototypes to be tested before they are sent to mass manufacturing. An excuse to engage with a multi-faceted group of people, each of whom has a very different stake in the conversations and ensuing exchanges. The attempt is to treat the research outcomes and the social interaction in that group as a commons itself.

Critical appropriation

Paraphrasing [Paulo Freire](#), instead of promoting a banking-style of education about technology by transmitting reputable content, we should seek to encourage dialogue, use generative themes and train agents for social change.

Inclusion by default

The objectives, vocabulary, decision-making, and a sense of purpose are collectively defined. The bonds are deep and meaningful. That way, we are trying to build inclusion and literacy by default - from the ground up.

Inclusion and generous cities

My research on waste prevention and generous cities has engaged a diverse composition of audiences and stakeholders. From shop owners to freelance artists. Researchers in wealthy nations, activists in the global south, startup entrepreneurs, and so on. So far, my research studies have involved more than 20 participants.

Instead of situating as an external observer, I always considered myself part of that community. Naturally, that carries my own background of having had an anthropologist as a supervisor for my Master's, as well as my personal experience in an activist scene on digital rights in Brazil.

When it comes to reflecting on how to build systems to promote the reuse of objects and materials in cities and regions, an open and inclusive approach allows departing from commonsensical top-down thinking about “waste management” and all the problems it generates.

Instead, my ambition is to advance a commons-based perspective that allows **potential wealth to be identified and distributed**, generating economic opportunities for local actors and a positive impact on social and environmental issues. Inclusion and literacy are cornerstones of that vision.

