

# “DEMENTED” YOURSELF: AN IMMERSIVE WORKSHOP TO CO-DESIGN AS THE OTHERS

YANKI C LEE PHD, LINNÆUS UNIVERSITY & ENABLE FOUNDATION

## Abstract

What if everyday objects and even the city became demented? This was the speculative statement we used when investigating innovative ways to inspire citizens to find out more about dementia. *“Demented” Yourself* is an immersive design workshop. Together, we are going to experience how to use artistic expressions to actualise this life-limiting illness and explore possibilities for all. After a short introduction of a series of design and dementia projects, we are going to invite participants to immerse themselves into the world of dementia through actualisation.

## INTRODUCTION – CULTURAL MODEL

Dementia is projected by 2050 to afflict a third of the city’s inhabitants aged 80 or over. The most common type is Alzheimer’s disease, a life-limiting illness marked by a gradual deterioration of one’s mental capacities including memory, judgment and the ability to communicate.

With the risk of exaggeration, commonly dementia is considered to be part of the natural ageing process, and, thus, receives little special attention. Because of its complexity,

dementia is mysterious for many people and generally; understanding is limited to memory loss only (Lee, et.al. 2018).

While the medical and social care experts are busy developing cures/treatment and services to *help* people with dementia (PWD) and their carers, we believe the contribution of design research as well as creative practice could lie in enabling the public to better understand this mystery. This is why we turned medical research findings and social programmes into a new perspective for public awareness campaign through design/artistic practice.

## DEMENTIA & MAGIC

We, a group of design researchers, developed the cultural model of dementia for better understanding of its symptoms and public inclusion to those with dementia. We also want to empower them through creative means but the first thing we did is to change the naming, i.e. we stopped to call them the “patients” but people with dementia.

*What if everyday objects and even the city became demented?* Then, we started our exploration by using this speculative statement. Through this process we wanted to

enable everyone to better understand the high prevalence of dementia and show how people with dementia should/could be integrated into our society.

Our 1<sup>st</sup> attempt was the “*Objects with Dementia (2015)*”, a set of magical artefacts, which mimic/represent dementia symptoms, so that players can experience the confusion/frustration of having the disease. Our goal was to introduce the concept of magic to explore the potential of reframing the view of seeing dementia not as a loss but as a culture to be embraced.

## WELCOME TO DEMENTIALAND

From designing these demented objects including dementia skirt, apron, jacket, calculator and broom, etc., we expanded the concept of dementia and magic to the whole city.

Instead of creating a Dementia Village (a famous concept of care home for people with dementia), what if we extend our concept to the whole city and create an imaginative space where citizens with dementia can go out and live freely?

DEMENTIA GOING™ key message is to persuade everyone to “*let go*” with dementia, i.e. we should accept citizens with dementia in our communities. We aim to prepare all citizens ready to welcome citizens with

dementia to go out and live within their communities by inviting them to step into “DementiaLand (2018)”, a dementia-inspired magical environment, to experience different symptoms that go beyond just memory loss.

## BEYOND MEMORY LOSS - VISUALISING DEMENTIA

In order to prototype the concept of DementiaLand and further developed the cultural model of dementia and dementia + magic, we collaborated with medical doctors and dementia care service providers by interpreting medical research findings and social programmes into a new perspective for public awareness campaign.



We created a series of videos to visualise different symptoms<sup>1</sup> of dementia. We were

---

### 1 Common dementia symptoms:

1. Memory loss
2. Decline of orientation
3. Decline in problem solving skills
4. Decline in judgment
5. Visual and spatial problems
6. Decline in motor planning
7. Difficulty in following instructions
8. Difficulty in communicating
9. Misusing objects
10. Decrease in coordination and motor function
11. Decreased ability to focus or concentrate

intentionally avoiding the symptom of memory loss and hope citizens would pay more attention to all the other symptoms of dementia. These videos are named the “Strange videos” with the strapline of “it may be dementia”.

### **INVITATION FROM DEMENTIALAND**

With the novel approach and attractive art direction, these videos were given free airtime to show in different digital screens in busy shopping areas in the city, during the World Alzheimer’s Month (September 2018). Our intention was for citizens to aware the parallel world of dementia where there are citizens with dementia living with us performing strangely.

Finally, on World Alzheimer’s Day (21st September 2018), we created a design action: citizens from DementiaLand came out to interact with us. They request our understanding and explore their contribution to a more inclusive society – from dementia-friendly to dementia free society.

### **WORKSHOP PART 1: UNFOLDING DEMENTIA**

After sharing our creative journey, we would like to invite participants to actualise with us about their “dementia” by forming group of 3-4 members. Since participants might not have experience and knowledge about dementia, we are going to assign one dementia symptom for each group. Then each group got to unfold

their assigned symptom through artistic representation and materialisation.

### **WORKSHOP PART 2: ACTUALISING DEMENTIA**

*“Making the effort to look through other people’s eyes can be personally challenging – and sometimes deeply exhilarating – but it also has extraordinary potential as a force for social change,”* as Krznaric (2014) stated that people switch on their empathic brain can inspire revolution and embrace our world. The second part of the workshop is to actualise dementia through artistic approach should be about immersion, i.e. immerse yourself into your demented self that you have materialised in part 1.

\*\*\*IMPORTANT NOTICE: Since this workshop will be in a performance mode, participants are advised to wear comfortable clothing. Will be ideal in a spatial room that you can record your own performance.

### **REFERENCES**

- Krznaric R (2014), *Empathy: why it matters, and how to get it*, The Random House Group.
- Lee. Y, Hendriks. N and Tsang. A, (2018) “Demented City and Objects: Empathic Tools between Magic and Everyday Life,” in *Designing Cultures of Care*, Bloomsbury.

