

Song of Iliad

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Abstract. The short story “Song of Iliad” describes a future music therapy “performance space” in which children around the globe create music together, form a band and perform for others. The story encapsulates the human-driven design approach and presents an example of how future design processes might exploit emotion-driven design in creating highly personified products and services.

Keywords. Smart Spaces, Do-it-yourself experiences, User-Centred Design (UCD), Human-Technology Interaction (HTI), Design for All (DfA), Music Therapy.



Figure 1. Song of Iliad.

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Introduction

The “Song of Iliad” (Figure 1) describes the world of a twelve-year-old boy who is isolated, and looking for a friend – an idea not too far-fetched, perhaps, as the starting point of a story or study. The story illustrates a novel smart-space concept that twines around a magical music box, the box revealing a hidden world that unfurls slowly through music. In describing a long-term use of currently non-existent technology, and allowing the reader to imagine the details, the story’s science fiction prototyping method further stretches the means of early-phase, user-centred design methods [1]. The story also broadens the perspective of current technological achievements to embrace emotion-driven design, acknowledging that emotions are expected to be an important research subject in future design of highly personified products and services [2, 3].

1. Do-it-yourself Smart Environments

“Song of Iliad”, a sci-fi short story, is inspired by a research project that has developed the “DIYSE Music Creation Tool”, aimed at people with intellectual learning disabilities²[4]. The tool is part of the Eureka/ITEA2 DIYSE (Do It Yourself Smart Experiences) project³. The general aim of the project is to enable ordinary people to create setup and control applications in their smart living environments, and in the public Internet-of-Things space. This is achieved by allowing them to take advantage of aware services and smart objects in order to obtain highly personalised, social, interactive, flowing experiences at home and in other environments. The development of the “DIYSE Music Creation Tool”, the user studies and the evaluation of the tool were all aimed at studying the needs and expectations of new technologies in the context of music therapy. The actual prototype consisted of software and physical guitar controllers. The software allowed the music therapist to personalise interaction mapping between physical and digital instrument components. By means of the guitars, the study’s users – people with intellectual learning disabilities – were able to play prepared musical compositions without extensive training. The observations and evaluations of the tool were carried out in a natural music therapy situation, allowing the gathering of information on adaption and usability of the software and instruments. All music therapy sessions were video-recorded and later analysed using an interaction analysis method [5, 6]. According to the evaluations, the study participants considered performing on stage, publishing music and training for a performance to be important. “Song of Iliad” attempts to highlight the issues that emerged and stretch the idea further, beyond the limitations of current technology.

The music therapy case was nevertheless only one example of the human-driven means of developing a smart space concept. One endeavour of the DIYSE project has been to research and develop the overall architectural structure of smart spaces – consisting, for example, of all the physical building blocks, applications, sensors and sensor data – and, furthermore, how the users interact with the technology and how the information is presented [7]. The paradigm lies in the question ‘what are the means for the users to interact with the smart space system?’ The story also commits on

² People who have a mild or moderate (Diagnosis ICD-10) intellectual learning disability

³ <http://www.dyse.org>

evaluation methodologies by offering a method for performing the evaluation in situ, i.e. where the users are [8]. In its illustration of a specific smart space concept, the story's general value for science lies in its focusing attention on human behaviour, rather than on novel technology, and in doing so, signposting an alternative path in the field of human-technology interaction.

2. Song of Iliad

Iliad was a crippled boy raised by his uncle Nestor and aunt Alice in the depressing landscape of Upper Sandusky, Ohio. Iliad had been born with legs and hands shorter than his body, at least shorter than extremities should be in a twelve-year-old boy. Because of his disabilities, and his forsaken dwelling place, Iliad lived an isolated life and felt alienated. Luckily, Iliad had an old white shepherd dog Pris, his sole source of happiness.

One ordinary morning, or what at first seemed to be an ordinary morning, Iliad was surprised by his Aunt Alice. Even though it was not his birthday, Alice took Iliad to the upper attic, where she gave him a special gift box. Later, Iliad thought that Alice could have been more talkative while giving him the present, but there was apparently a good reason why she only said:

'This is no ordinary gift box. I received it from your music therapist, Paula, and she instructed me to leave you alone to figure out its mystery by yourself.'

Iliad observed the box from close to and from a distance. The box was an ornamented package, covered in purple velvet, a very intriguing thing indeed. As Iliad heard his aunt leave – and ignoring Pris, who was barking a warning – he opened the box and heard a purring sound. Soon after, he saw a holographic image appearing into the thin air. The image was blurred and it quivered at first, before focusing and revealing the head of an odd-looking woman, with a tight topknot, strange glasses and a resentful expression. The woman sighed, and said with a machine-like voice:

<Hello, my name is Ellen Blaise and I am from the Music Therapy Research Group. I am your wizard and evaluator in the Muzic box application. I will ask you a few questions and I want you to reply as truthfully as you can. After the background research, there will be a decision on how the experiment is to continue.>

Iliad said nothing, just gulped.

<Respond: name, age, address, gender and occupation.>

'Err... I am Iliad. I am twelve. I live in Upper Sandusky, Ohio, United States, and I am a boy, so I do nothing... except go to school, play and do some errands on the farm and... do... nothing. This is Pris. She is a dog, and she is nine years old.'

<Recorded. Do you have a disability?>

'How did you know about that?' said Iliad, surprised. He was also a little annoyed when he added: "I do have twisted legs and hands, so you might call me a cripple."

<Recorded. What makes you happy? What is your greatest wish?>

Iliad hesitated. He was not sure of Ellen Blaise's purpose in asking these questions; what was she driving at? Nevertheless, Iliad decided that if this was a game, he didn't have too much to lose by it. He responded to his formal-sounding questioner by revealing his deepest desire:

'I wish that I had friends.'

<Recorded. Have you ever played music? Any instruments?>

‘No, I guess I’ve never played, except in therapy classes. My uncle has a flute, though, but he never allows me to touch it.’

The ethereal but inflexible Ellen Blaise seemed satisfied, when she said:

<Background research completed. You may start exploring the material. Try to build a musical instrument of your own choice. Take your time. End of phase one.>

The hologram vanished inside the box, a tiny red light began to flash, and instead of purring, the box now hummed. Iliad placed it carefully on the ground and looked around. What had the woman meant by saying he should built an instrument? Iliad noticed that under the box was a much larger trunk, a trunk he had never seen before. He opened it, in turn to discover strange-looking items that seemed vaguely like musical instruments. The objects were fascinating. Iliad began to piece them together, and soon the whole attic was filled with outlandish devices. The parts connected easily to one another, providing countless options. Pris helped Iliad by bringing him parts that were lying around the trunk. By late afternoon Iliad had built a dozen combinations that, at least in his mind, were reminiscent of musical instruments. He pressed the ones that invited pressing, beat the ones that called for beating, and blew the ones that demanded blowing. Through simple expressions he was able to generate sounds; sometimes even a single press or light blow brought complex tones. Iliad felt a strange obsession and passion in creating music – music that floated so easily and filled the air. Time lost meaning, and before Iliad noticed, it was late. That night, Iliad climbed into bed with Pris and, for the first time in years, felt a slight tingling in his chest.

The next day, Iliad ran back to the attic and opened the magic music box with enthusiasm. Once again, Ellen Blaise appeared from the box. Her evident restraint, in contrast with the boy’s eagerness, gave the impression that she had got out on the wrong side of bed.

<Phase one analysed. Do you wish to continue?>

‘Yes!’

<Pick an instrument of your choice and say ‘Done’ when you are ready.>

Iliad looked at the devices he had built yesterday. They all seemed as inspiring as they had seemed last night, but which one did he like the most? Intuitively, he picked up a flute-like, silver instrument. Deciding that it was in need of fine-tuning, he experimented and changed some parts. Iliad chose the flute to be exactly the size that matched the length of his short arms. Because his fingers were small, he added a few keys to the middle of the flute, and because he had strong lungs, he added a bagpipe-like extension. Finally, he was satisfied.

‘Done!’ he said, proudly. Ellen Blaise responded accordingly:

<Play something with your instrument: recording begins in ten seconds.>

Ellen counted down from ten and, on reaching zero, remarked sharply:

<Recording begins!>

Iliad was composed when he put the mouthpiece to his lips and let the sweet music fill the attic. The magic of the instrument was that it generated harmonious tunes. There was no need to know anything of music theory or notes, and it was impossible to make a mistake while playing. His music was quickly improvised, but it filled him with pride and joy. When Iliad had finished, Ellen Blaise said, in a standoffish tone:

<Music recorded. What is the name of the song?>

Iliad hesitated, but replied contentedly:

‘The Song of Iliad.’

<Recorded. This is your calling song. Inside the music box you will find a ring. When the ring changes colour, you have made a contact: then you must return. End of phase two.>

Iliad was puzzled when he looked for the ring from the music box, and found nothing. After careful and persistent inspection, he came across a hidden secret compartment and, consequently, the mysterious ring. The cover of the ring, was made of some unknown material, stone or glass perhaps, and was coloured matte blue. Iliad put the ring on his finger and went out of the attic. He felt excited, although a little uncertain about what was going to happen next. Yet the mystery of the game made it twice as exciting!

Iliad's uncle had a farm, and the following morning Iliad was milking cows. Pris helped him as well as she could by following him, and avoiding the milking robot. Iliad was just about to put the milking robot into the stall, when his ring changed to a shiny green. Iliad toppled a chair over as he rushed out and headed for the attic, with Pris on his heels. He opened the music box with trembling hands. He was breathing heavily, because he didn't know what awaited him. Iliad was in for a surprise. Instead of Ellen Blaise, the pop-up hologram showed a young girl, about the same age as Iliad.

'How do you do?' said Iliad, shyly.

The girl made no response. She shrugged, and tried to speak, but no words came from her lips. Then the girl picked up a violin-like instrument that in some way resembled a melodica. She started playing, and Iliad was fascinated. He could hear the music loud and clear, as if the girl had been in the attic too. He listened to her play, recovering from the spell only when the girl finally finished her song. Then she gestured Iliad to play for her. After Iliad had played for a while, the mystery girl joined him. They found a common tune immediately, and soon their playing began to resemble a conversation. A conversation in which the two parties were trying to influence each other's performance, occasionally losing the common melody, then gradually finding their way back. There was a point when Iliad played too slowly and the girl tried to match her timing according to his playing. Iliad tried to improvise and when he began playing to his heart's content, the girl laughed hysterically. Before they knew, morning had become noon, and they found they had whiled away several hours in simply playing together. The girl signed that she had to leave, she bent over the music box and her hologram disappeared. Her sudden absence left the attic dismal and empty.

Two days had passed since Iliad had played with the girl. The day before, he had climbed up to the attic and played alone on his strange instrument. Then he had built more instruments, and created new sounds. But somehow the joy of creating music by himself, without a friend, was no longer so fascinating: not now that he had experienced the joy of playing with someone else. The activity kept him busy, though, and all the time he was learning something new. Iliad tried to concentrate on his duties at school and on the farm, but he kept a continual watch on his finger, out of the corner of his eye, in case it glowed green again. When Iliad was slowly climbing the ladder to the attic, he felt a slight tickle in his finger, and saw the ring shining. But now it was glowing red instead of green! Iliad opened the music box, holding his breath. This time the holographic image showed a young boy. He was very pale and skinny and it was hard to say how old he was. He might have looked older than he really was. Iliad raised his hand but said nothing, not being sure if the boy would turn out as quiet as the girl

had been. Iliad waited for the other boy to introduce himself, which he did. Unfortunately, Iliad was unable to understand a word he said. When the pale boy noticed this, he repeated very slowly:

‘Minä olen Aki, kuka sinä olet?’ He pressed his hand over his chest and then pointed towards Iliad.

‘Oh, I am Iliad. Hi Aki.’

Iliad picked up his fine-tuned flute, and the other boy drew out something that appeared to be a round-shaped harmonica. Aki played very fast and changed the tune unexpectedly. Iliad found it very hard to keep up with him, and saw that he could not play as well together with Aki as he had with the girl. Aki noticed this, too, and after a while they began to take turns. Iliad played his calling song, and Aki played his fast and anxious music piece. Slowly, Iliad began to understand the logic of Aki’s music, and every once in a while he played a note during Aki’s turn. This experience turned out to be very different to Iliad’s experience with the girl, but in the end, it was almost even more enjoyable, as it has taken some effort to learn to play together.

For the next three days, Iliad came to the attic and played with Aki. After an exceptionally enjoyable music session, Aki had to leave early. Iliad felt discontent when the image disappeared, but his dissatisfaction did not last long. Soon his ring began to glow green, and the image of the girl appeared from the open box. The girl waved happily to Iliad, but before Iliad could wave back, the girl’s hologram moved to the left, and another image appeared. Iliad saw a new boy, who introduced himself:

‘Hello. I am Victor. I live in Bedford, England.’

‘Hi. My name is Iliad.’

‘I heard from Nina that you two had met. She lives in East Germany, by the way. She told me you’re new, but that you play well.’

Iliad was surprised.

‘Oh, has she? I mean, I thought she doesn’t speak.’

‘She doesn’t,’ said Victor. ‘She has damage to her brain that has made her deaf. It also gives her severe headaches that last for days, and that’s why she hasn’t been able to play with you lately.’ He continued, ‘And we talk to each other by our wizards.’

‘Wizards! You mean Ellen Blaise, the top-knot lady?’

Victor laughed.

‘You really are new! We all have different wizards. Mine looks like a hairy slob, with a beard and a belly. He calls himself Archibald Butler. And I understand that Nina’s wizard is a proper punk rocker.’

Nina laughed and nodded. Iliad was confused.

‘I haven’t seen Ellen Blaise for days. I’ve only played with a boy called Aki.’

Victor smiled and took on an educational tone as he explained,

‘You call your wizard if you need guidance. It seems your wizard is not as talkative as mine. If you want to make a call you have to press the button, the one that sort of asks to be pressed, if you know what I mean.’

Iliad bent over and saw the button. Of course, he had seen it before. He just didn’t like the idea of pressing buttons if he didn’t know what they did. Victor continued.

‘You can leave a message for your wizard if you want to know something, and the wizard contacts you later.’

‘Thanks, but I don’t have anything in mind at the moment. Shall we play instead?’

‘Sure,’ said Victor, and Nina nodded.

It seemed Victor had chosen to play the drums, if that was the right word for his instrument. It was difficult to distinguish anything by a hologram, since Victor had spread the various bits and pieces all around him. Iliad concentrated on listening while Victor and Nina played a song they had apparently rehearsed well beforehand. After a while, Victor asked Iliad to play his calling song. Victor and Nina both smiled as they listened to it, and seemed to enjoy. Victor began to provide a rhythm, and as Nina joined, she became so wrapped up in the music that she continued into a tremendous solo with her violin-like instrument, and the boys had to stop what they were doing and just listen to her play. When they had finished Iliad's song, Victor suddenly remembered.

'You said you'd been playing with a boy called Aki. Was he any good?'

Iliad became excited.

'Well, at first you could only listen to him as he played so fast. But it was fun to follow his playing and learn from him.'

'We could try to contact him. If you call your wizard, you can ask if all four of us can play together. Let's say, tomorrow? Is that OK with you, Nina?'

Nina nodded, and Iliad inquired,

'So, I just press the button?'

'Just press the button. I have to go now.'

'Wait!' Iliad exclaimed. He wanted to know something about Victor.

'What's your disability?' Iliad showed his arms and continued,

'We all seem to have something. I guess that's why we have been chosen for this experiment, or whatever you call it.'

Victor smiled, and then became serious.

'I don't have anything, I just like to play. Well, I am a bit shy. I like to be by myself. It certainly seems to be a disability nowadays.'

Victor was more serious than he had been all day and he wanted to reassure Iliad.

'Disabilities can be a state of mind. They can truly trouble you in real life, but there are no disabilities in this world. Just plain music. You are a great musician, Iliad. And that goes for you, too, Nina!'

Nina smiled and waved, and her hologram vanished, then Victor nodded, and his hologram disappeared too. Iliad savoured Victor's words, and found them comforting. He drew the box closer and gazed at the alluring calling button. When he finally pressed it, Ellen Blaise appeared quickly. She was tense, as usual.

<You have a request. What do you wish?>

'I was wondering, could all four of us play together? Aki, Victor, Nina and me?'

<Request recorded.>

Ellen Blaise vanished. Iliad rose up and stretched his legs. That night, when Iliad came down the stairs, his steps were lighter, and looking through his bedroom window, the night sky seemed a degree brighter. Pris climbed on to the foot of the bed, and was pleased when her owner finally paid her some attention, too.

The next day, Iliad once again experienced a strange tingling in his chest. Anticipation made him feel tense and insecure. When he walked towards the attic, he knew what to expect, as during breakfast his ring had changed from green to red, and then from red to yellow. This time, on opening the magic box, all his new friends emerged. No time was wasted on talking, as all knew Iliad and Victor were the only ones who could communicate with words. They began by playing their calling songs. Victor and Nina appeared to find Aki's way of playing very strange. His manner was quite frantic and

his music fast. After a while, all became used to his ways. They seemed to enjoy that Aki brought a surprise element into playing music, and invited others to expand their boundaries. The four musicians played until nightfall. At the end of the day, Victor seemed to radiate.

‘I think this is it! I think I have finally found myself a band!’

Nina and Aki looked approvingly at each other, but Iliad couldn't work out why Victor was making such a fuss.

‘What do you mean by a band? Isn't it just great to play together?’

The others looked at Iliad enthusiastically, and Victor expressed their common thoughts in words,

‘With a band, we can record music and perform!’

This was a new idea for Iliad, a curious and intrusive thought. Iliad asked,

‘Who'll listen to the recordings? And who will we perform to?’

Victor smiled.

‘To everyone! There's a great cloud site called “His Mastermind's Voice” broadcasting selected music sent to their site via Muzic Box. Top ten bands can perform live once a month. They broadcast the holographic performance all over the world!’

Strangely enough, Aki seemed to understand what Victor was saying, as he added,

‘His Mastermind's Voice! Top Ten! Olen nähnyt sen Tampereella!’

Victor was glad that Aki also knew about the performance space. Then he remembered something else.

‘But I think we need a singer. All the best bands have a singer.’

He glanced at Aki and Nina. Nina shrugged her shoulders. Aki shook his head.

‘I can't sing. I don't want to sing. But I could write lyrics,’ said Iliad.

Victor seemed to approve.

‘Could you write lyrics to Iliad's song? When you have something ready, we can figure out who sings it.’

Iliad nodded. He was actually quite happy with this assignment, because he enjoyed writing poems. This was something he had not told anyone, ever. Writing lyrics for a band certainly sounded like a step up. Victor was pleased.

‘After we have the song, we can send it to “His Mastermind's Voice”!’

The following week turned out to be busy for Iliad. He reviewed all his poems and found bits here and there that matched the music. Yet the task was by no means a simple one. Iliad was tormented by sentences, words and syntax, and the task of writing lyrics followed him wherever he went. When he was milking the cows, the rhythm of the milking machine mixed with the song and he ended up having to change the melody, too. Nina had been absent the whole week, and Victor suspected it was because of her headaches. Most of the time, Iliad had played separately with Aki and Victor, and they soon learned not to rush him, or even to ask him how he was getting on. That suited Iliad fine, and by the end of the week he was ready to share his thoughts with the band. Iliad's hands were sweating as he held the paper in front of him. He had played the newly composed tune, and the others fumbled for the melody. While they were playing in the background, Iliad was enunciating the words rather than singing them. The others listened pensively while Iliad told them a tale about the wizard of Oz [10], a scarecrow who wanted to have a brain, a tin woodman who wanted a heart, and a cowardly lion, who needed to be brave. Then he told of himself, how he wanted nothing more than to have friends. He went on to describe the silver flute that made his

dream come true, the wizard with many faces, and the yellow-brick road they all walked along towards the sunrise. He ended the tale with the words "We are not alone". While Iliad had been reading the lyrics to the band, he had not once glanced at his audience. Now he raised his gaze and met an overwhelming silence. Even Victor seemed speechless. Suddenly, all began to applaud, and Victor recovered his voice.

'Unbelievable! You have really stuck your neck out with this... this masterpiece!'

Aki nodded his head, and Nina kept clapping her hands. Iliad had never been so proud in all his life. Pris, sensing this, waved her tail and pressed her nose in his lap.

The band began to practice. After a few days, Victor succeeded in finding a suitable melody for the lyrics, and gave a distinctive rendering of its message. He had mentioned earlier that he was uncomfortable about being in the limelight, and especially about being the lead singer of the band. Now that the band had its own song, a message to the world, he didn't feel uncomfortable at all. Iliad, happy with Victor's adaptation, concentrated on the song's intonation. There was a reason for this, since Aki developed such rich and complex rhythm patterns that he had to be restrained and slowed down. One day Nina was practising another melody on her own. It was obvious by now that Nina had a real talent for music, and she could invent melodies and create compositions in a different way from the rest of the band. The others ceased to listen to her music in terms of the main song, and, after a little tuning, the new melody fitted in nicely as the song's solo part. Once the band had polished the "Song of Iliad" to perfection, they began to contemplate the recording and sharing of the song.

'I think the song is ready. What should we do next?' asked Iliad.

'Well, we'll have to make a recording first. We'll have to play the song as well as we can and then send it to a wizard. Perhaps, it should be your wizard, as you composed the song.'

Iliad shrugged, and wondered what Ellen Blaise would think when she heard it. Probably nothing. Victor was suddenly troubled.

'Before we can send the song to "His Mastermind's Voice", our band will have to have a name. Does anyone have any suggestions?'

The task of inventing a name proved difficult. Iliad had no suggestion of his own. Aki had a dozen, but no one understood them. While Victor was trying to fathom Aki's suggestions and find one of his own, Nina began drawing something on a piece of paper. When she had finished, she showed the drawing to the others.

'Green spectacles!' Victor and Iliad cried out together.

'Why not?' said Iliad, and all were agreed.

'Right. Is it OK for everyone if we record the song tomorrow?' Victor asked, and all nodded.

The next day Victor showed Iliad how to record the song on his music box. It was very simple; all he had to do was press another button. The band had to play the piece almost fifty times, however, before Iliad was satisfied. After an exhausting day, the others left Iliad alone so that he could call Ellen Blaise. When Ellen's hologram appeared from the box, she looked different, somehow, although Iliad couldn't pinpoint what the difference was. Seeing that Ellen wasn't going to speak first, Iliad began by saying,

'I have a new song for sending to "His Mastermind's Voice".'

It seemed, for once, that Ellen was meeting Iliad on-line. There were no prescribed questions, and she seemed more sensitive than her formal, pre-recorded self.

‘So soon! You and your musical friends must blend well together if you have already recorded a song.’

‘Do you want to hear it?’

‘Of course! Play it for me.’

Iliad pressed the button, and “Song of Iliad” was unleashed to fill the air. Iliad observed Ellen’s reactions and at one point, during the chorus, he thought he saw a tear running down her cheek. It could have been a holographic mirage, though. Nevertheless, Ellen’s voice trembled when she said,

‘That was a beautiful song! I will send it to “His Mastermind’s Voice” right away.’

When Ellen was about to set off, Iliad said,

‘I want to thank you, Ellen Blaise, for all that you’ve done for me.’

Ellen looked at Iliad and smiled for the first time.

‘You did it all yourself, Iliad. I and the Music Therapy Research Group, we just offered the tools for you.’

The rest is history: “Song of Iliad” became the most popular song on Muzic Box and stayed on top for 24 weeks. The band, Green Spectacles, performed the song once a month, although, since their holographic images were projected on to specially created stages, they didn’t need to go on tour. Green spectacles, worn for every performance, became the band’s trademark. Finally, the last line of the lyrics became a popular slogan for the Music Therapy Research Group and “His Mastermind’s Voice” performance space: “We are not alone”⁴.

2.1. Epilogue

Ellen Blaise was sipping tea with Iliad’s uncle Nestor and aunt Alice in their comfortable living room. Aunt Alice sat with her back straight, too tense to drink anything. Uncle Nestor sat quietly opposite his wife while he observed the proud-looking, strange woman on their sofa. Ellen Blaise cleared her throat and said,

‘The experiment exceeded my all expectations.’

‘Amazingly!’ Alice burst out, and continued, ‘Iliad has never been so enthusiastic about anything. The boy has certainly changed, I can tell you that much.’

Ellen flinched when Pris put her nose in her lap, but then began stroking its neck. Uncle Nestor straightened his back and said,

‘When I was young, there used to be singing competitions. That was really something, when thousands of gifted singers queued up for the trial contest, and only a handful were selected to perform. One by one, the competitors were eliminated, until there was only the most talented one left.’

Aunt Alice knew exactly where this conversation was leading. She had heard it a thousand times before. Nestor cleared his throat and said proudly,

‘I took part in a song contest myself. I was selected for the finals, and I was voted sixth, but then...’

‘An ear for music runs in the family,’ said Aunt Alice, interrupting, and looked at Ellen regretfully. Nestor had picked up a framed photograph and was admiring a younger version of himself, waving a flower bouquet. The picture was evidently a

⁴ Quotation from the movie “Close Encounters of the Third Kind”, 1977

snapshot from the contest he had just been describing. With some annoyance, he continued,

‘Nowadays anyone can perform and publish music. There are no stars and idols to admire. Everything is just one grey mass, doing this and that, performing and publishing. A dog barking at its own tail, that’s what it is!’

Ellen Blaise, looking a little harassed, smiled and said,

‘I am sorry you feel that way, Mr Tyrell. We at the Music Therapy Research Group think that the progress has been remarkable since those days, now that the joy of making music and playing together has become the main objective. These children don’t have to compete if they don’t want to. But competition, of course, sets goals in playing music. I thought you would have been prouder of Iliad’s achievements. After all, his accomplishments are beyond dispute. His band has performed worldwide, not just in a national song contest.’

Uncle Nestor seemed shocked by Ellen’s sharp-sighted reply, but held his tongue. Ellen looked at Pris and continued,

‘Iliad’s initial motive for playing music was not in competing, or even in playing his music. His main objective was to gain friends.’

‘Those trivial ghosts,’ snorted Uncle Nestor.

‘Well, we tried using avatars at first, because we thought some of our customers might prefer to remain anonymous. That didn’t work at all. Even though Iliad’s friends are not actually present, and they have the ghostly appearance, they are as real for him as this dog is. I believe Pris is your name, isn’t it?’ said Ellen, and looked Pris in the eyes. ‘The most exclusive part of their friendship is that they don’t even have to speak the same language. They can express their thoughts through looks and expressions, just as Pris does.’ Ellen Blaise raised her head and looked first at Uncle Nestor and then at aunt Alice, and said, ‘But Iliad and his friends have something this dog doesn’t have – and that is music. Music is a common language that binds people together.’

3. Reflection

The short story “Song of Iliad” describes a somewhat sugar-frosted, perfect music therapy situation. Here, the definitive advantage of a science fiction prototyping technique lies in not being restricted by prevailing conditions, imperfect technology *or* unpredictable users. The authentic evaluations and observations of the “DIYSE Music Creation Tool” revealed that, in reality, people with intellectual learning disabilities have very different variations in their skills and learning capability. With contemporary technology, it would be extremely difficult to construct a “music performance space” such as this that would be flexible and adaptive enough to truly satisfy all needs. In contrast, the users of the tool in the story – the children who used the magic music box – were highly independent and learned to use the system quickly and intuitively.

Though “Song of Iliad” contains little illustration, the story’s design – the outward appearance of the science fiction innovations that were described – was important. The self-made instruments that the reader could build in his or her mind in fact constituted one of the key elements of the story. As to the rest of the imaginary mock-up set, such as the mysterious music box with its buttons and secret compartments, could be seen as being almost irresistible to a child through its semantic meaning and appearance. The ghost-like genies reinforce the magical atmosphere of the box, while the chameleon ring is something one would proudly carry around as a token of membership of some

secret society. Novel approach for emotional design was infiltrated effortlessly into the story, as the current tendency is to create highly personated products and services that are designed from the premises of the needs and wants of the individual users.

The advantage of this story's science fiction prototyping method lay in describing the usage situation of a forthcoming technology over the long run. By way of contrast, many early phase evaluation methods, such as short scenarios of prototypes, are tantamount to snapshots of the usage situation, thereby limiting also the evaluation results. In addition, current early phase development methods usually attempt to describe technological inventions in detail, sometimes even using detailed images, which has the effect of restricting the imagination of the users. Science fiction stories may easily be viewed as tools for stimulating conversation among users and developers on the usage situations at the fuzzy front end of design processes.

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