Our GIFT to All of Us: GA(Y)AM
Preface

This special issue of AVANT is all about Cognitive Innovation. It is not about CogNovo, the interdisciplinary and international doctoral training programme that produced three different Off the Lip events. It is not about Off the Lip 2017, the novel symposium format we developed to collaboratively create a publication resulting in this special issue of AVANT. It is not about the seemingly heterogeneous collection of papers that follow this preface. *Collaborative Approaches to Cognitive Innovation* required something else, something we are starting to capture in the four GIFT principles. While this special issue is not solely about CogNovo, Off the Lip events, or the content of the following submissions, all these aforementioned elements were necessary to shape our current understanding of Cognitive Innovation, the very process which led to numerous publications, exhibitions, and events during the past three years. In a sense, all of our previous endeavours have culminated in this collection of 26 distinct pieces of work, yet we hope and believe that this special issue also marks a beginning. Let us explain.

Similarly to you reading this article right now, most of us joined the work on Cognitive Innovation *in medias res.* A unique transdisciplinary strategy was already being discussed when the doctoral training programme CogNovo formed around it. At that time, it seemed that CogNovo was born out of the desire to build a *multidisciplinary* team, to formulate *interdisciplinary* research questions, and aiming "to be truly *transdisciplinary*" (Denham, 2014, p. 202). Each of the 25 CogNovo research fellows, selected from a large cohort of applicants with a diverse range of backgrounds, were assigned to a team of academic supervisors and industrial partners (for more details, see Maranan, Loesche, & Denham, 2015). In addition to the doctoral training and through several workshops and symposia, spontaneous collaborations were triggered; project-related groups that formed and disbanded, with the roles of each individual changing over the course of CogNovo. We realise now that these dynamics and their implications reflect one of the necessities identified by Choi and Pak (2006) in their literature review on transdisciplinarity, to "transcend the disciplinary boundaries to look at the dynamics of whole systems" (p. 355), but this discussion would take us beyond the scope of this preface. Besides observations of the process,

our results can also be traced through the generated artefacts, for example the texts written from the angle of multiple disciplines about the shared topic of Cognitive Innovation transcending into new knowledge—some of which are collected in this special issue of AVANT.

Cognitive Innovation has been described as a self-referential and incremental process that changes itself. Denham and Punt (2017) have given it a functional form, mapping the accessible knowledge of the environment, the individual, as well as their mental processes through these same mental processes onto themselves. In the first Off the Lip in 2015, Blassnigg (2015) linked this to Bergson's merging of memory and image as a "dynamic process within the mind in its constant self-creation in osmosis with its enaction in the given environment" (p. 17) As a result, the engagement with CogNovo not only changed the knowledge about Cognitive Innovation, but it also must have changed the group, changed the individuals involved, and changed the research process itself—a process of Cognitive Innovation as well. In summary, one might argue that research is changed by research itself and as such, cannot be planned in full at its outset. This leaves the question of how such a dynamic process can be understood, not to mention researched?

The GIFT of Improvisation

Our inspiration for thinking about research in such a dynamic and open setting comes from improvisation practice. Improvisation has been described as a vivid practice in the arts, which highlights the collaborative settings, openness, ongoing exploration, and reinforcement of the creative process. The bases for improvisation are curiosity and the embracement of surprise. Improvisation focuses on the process rather than the outcome; it welcomes uncertainty and understands progress as a dynamic change. Outcomes appear through (and in) the process of doing, without clear initial expectations of results. We propose that transdisciplinarity can be understood and framed as improvisational research. We consider the following four main principles to contribute to this type of research:

> **G**enerosity: Share ideas, constructive criticism, and reflections, to allow knowledge and methods to develop, and perspectives to adjust. Share as much as you can and be generous enough to acknowledge when the time is not right for an idea. Every contribution, from any individual or discipline should be considered of equal eligibility. Be curious about their knowledge and methods.

> **I**nterdependence: Use and establish links between partners, research questions, and solutions from different disciplines. Improving the accessibility of your language and ideas reflects a capability to generalise, not to simplify concepts. It allows you to share the perspectives and principles of a discipline, find the connections to knowledge from other fields, and establish a common

ground with the others. Anticipatory planning cannot account for inputs from all participants, instead implement a "rolling ball" strategy and embrace associations that allow reshaping ideas. The weight of the influences that shape your project will change throughout the different phases of the project.

Free exploration: Allow time for exploration and experimentation with different approaches. Allow successes and failures to inspire the next step and allow input from others as well as coincidences to influence your contribution. It is important to embrace the risk that comes with this approach.

Trust: Participation and contribution requires trust. Trust is not built on promises, but it needs time and action to grow; trust that everyone is contributing as much as they can. Respect the improvisational space and all individuals who share it with you, and acknowledge the origin of ideas.

Improvisational practice does not replace planning and it certainly does not replace preparation or research rigour. On the contrary, improvisational time and space require explicit attention and rigorous planning. Having clear spatial and temporal constraints on a collaborative process allows individuals, and the group as a whole, to adjust their commitment between sessions according to previous experiences and constraints outside the improvisation. These boundaries act as a safety net that allows unconstrained application of the other four principles during improvisation.

GIFT: Current Version

During CogNovo, the organisation of events changed over time, culminating in this year's Off the Lip 2017. The novel format of a collaborative, feedback-based Off the Lip 2017 symposium leading to this special issue was successful beyond our expectations. We invited speakers to come with "almost ready" papers that they would consider publishing in this special issue. Once we received all submissions and to ensure high quality of feedback, we asked each of the authors to write a response to one or two other submissions. During the event, these responses were presented just after the papers, before opening the discussion and questions to the whole audience. We designed the event as a single track with extended "social time." These longer lunch breaks, shared breakfasts, and evening events served as an informal platform to exchange ideas. They emphasised the personal interactions and they also ensured that each submission received adequate feedback. The principles of GIFT were implemented inherently and implicitly yet some of them were identified in the discussion with all delegates towards the end of Off the Lip 2017.

If Cognitive Innovation is, as suggested, the driving force behind the research we have practiced within CogNovo, then this practice is not just the result of the knowledge of the individuals of the extended network of CogNovo and the environment we are situated in. It is, at the same time, an aggregated result emerging from

all previous events and collaborations, a fleeting temporal manifestation, and a foundation for future iterations. Even through writing and reading this text, we will change our and your future practices. Therefore "GIFT Ain't (Yet) A Manifesto," but we invite you, the reader, to join us in developing the idea further.

Earlier in this text we articulated the hope that Off the Lip 2017 and these texts will not just be the climax of the doctoral training programme CogNovo.eu, but rather abeginning. Concretely, we would also like to announce the beginning of the CogNovo Foundation. If you enjoy or want to criticise our approach, if you want to engage or want to grow these ideas into a "Manifesto," then please get in contact through our website at CogNovo.org. In the meantime, we hope you will find the writings in this special issue both an insightful and intriguing input to the next iteration of your process of Cognitive Innovation.

Frank Loesche & Klara Łucznik
with the OTLip17 Committee:
Susan L. Denham, Hannah Drayson, Kathryn B. Francis, Diego S. Maranan, & Michael Punt

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