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## Interview - Stories to Drive Change

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INTERVIEW – PAU GARCIA



Domestic Data Streamers, a creative data firm founded by Barcelona native Pau Garcia, is driving changes in how people view and use data, both at home in Spain and abroad. Through interactive installations and exhibits, as well as innovative product designs, the studio is proving there's more to data than precise mathematics and unchallenged objectivity.

Written by Sunni Zhang

# STORIES TO DRIVE CHANGE



We now live in a world driven by data. If it still occurs to you that data resembles piles of cold hard information and numbers that only make sense for relentless analysts, meet Pau Garcia. Garcia leads Domestic Data Streamers, a studio aiming to transform our perceptions of data and how we interact with it. "We create participatory projects that build community and knowledge, communication campaigns that communicate, products that connect, and exhibitions that make people feel and think," says Garcia. Currently, Domestic Data Streamers has worked on projects in more than 17 countries and with more than 130 collaborative partners.

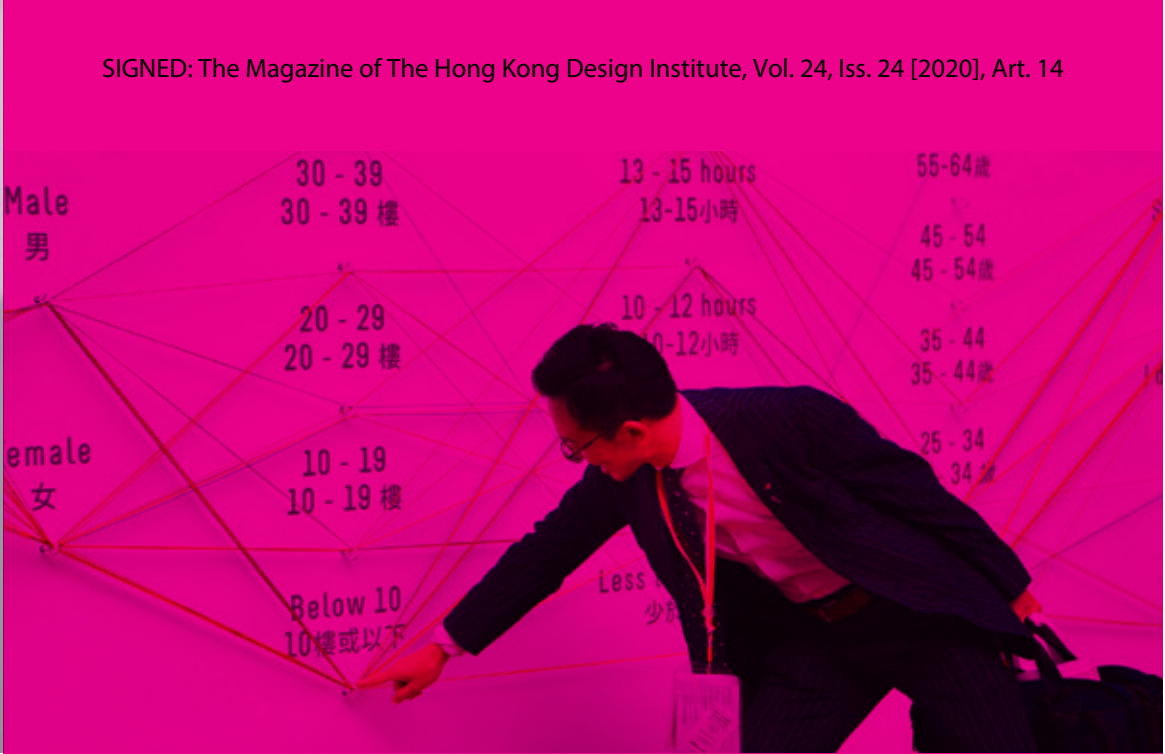
"By itself raw data is nothing. I mean, it's nothing important," says Garcia, "The challenge of design is to activate data, to transform it into a narrative, a message." Evidently, Domestic Data Streamers takes on that challenge. The studio's installations use data as a starting point, and invite the public to participate and gain knowledge beyond readily visible information. "Design should make visible the insights and knowledge hidden behind numbers and trigger an action to improve, resolve or at least understand it."

Garcia recognises the power of data in terms of its accuracy and efficiency, but he sees more potentials beyond

sole scientific applications. "The world is becoming a more complex, intricate and confusing place to live in. Numbers and data are key to understanding it, but they tend to detach the emotions that exist behind what they represent. I wanted to find a mix between the emotional side that arts have and the technical and pragmatic ways that I'd learnt in my design studies. Working with data in creative ways was the perfect way to integrate the most technical and empirical side with the explorative one."

Empathy is a key element in Domestic Data Streamers' works, but Garcia and his team are thinking ahead. "Design has always been human-centred, and





The global pandemic has put societies in turmoil and industries through uncertainty, but Garcia sees positive impacts during this unsettling time. He says, "People are more aware than ever that data can be manipulated, and that it needs the right context so that it is not misinterpreted or creating a false perception of reality. That is a good example of data literacy and I am happy to see that society is learning from its errors little by little."



Pau Garcia, Founder of Domestic Data Streamers.

Having a physical and empirical experience with data-driven exhibits are a crucial part of Domestic Data Streamers' works, but with social distancing gradually becoming a new norm, the studio is also learning to adapt. The group had to cancel many of their planned projects or digitise them, foregoing the physical experience an installation brings. "You cannot pretend to have the same impact with a physical event, exhibition or show than with a digital one. We are three dimensional beings, we need this physicality in our lives to truly connect with ideas and people in a deeper way," admits Garcia, "I'm sure we will end up figuring out new ways to continue to interact physically with each other."

and visualisation. Data itself may be an observed and concentrated scientific fact, but that doesn't mean we need a merciless context to apply it. "Imagine for a moment that every number you see shows the emotions and human impact hidden behind it. Imagine they show what they truly mean: not explained from a cold and precise mathematical perspective, but from a close, messy and emotional human reality."

The process of adding, or rather, retrieving emotions to data, presents us with more possibilities in data utilisation

"To drive change, you need stories, not just a report."



if today we are moving towards an emotional-centred model it is because we are collectively starting to see the value in designing something that needs to have a deeper impact on human lives." Garcia explains, "Still, we believe we need to switch to an earth-centred design, understanding that we are just part of a bigger and more complex system that is the planet where we live in, with all the ecosystems and natural resources that it contains."

for the generations to come." To "make numbers roll with emotions", is what Garcia envisions Domestic Data Streamers to be exploring. "The world cannot be understood without numbers, but it will not be understood with numbers alone." The public may still perceive data as having nothing much to do with the daily life, playing with data, however, is hardly a new activity for many industries. Humans have been collecting and observing data long enough to know that it is prone to manipulation. Regarding this, Garcia raises his concerns, "Historically data was tended to use in very scientific or technical environments. Today we live in a post-truth world where data is used in a totally different way: sometimes it is truly used to inform but sometimes it is just twisted to mean the opposite. It is a double-edged sword and obviously people use it in their best interest."

This idea is of course embodied in Domestic Data Streamers' various projects. The creative studio has addressed both pressing issues and overlooked topics over the years, including universal challenges faced by the entire globe, childhood risks, and regional public health care. "We as designers need to understand that we hold a responsibility, that each design we do has an impact and will have heavy consequences on the long term