



The workers tarot. A tool for designer-worker solidarity

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced a shift in the public's perception of workers. Essential service workers in particular, have been subject of constant public displays of appreciation, while being paradoxically confined to low wages, precarious conditions or imminent unemployment. Hospital janitors, cleaning personnel, meat pack workers, grocery cashiers, public transit workers, warehouse workers—a largely immigrant, Black, and Latino “essential” work force that does not have the choice of working from home. Meanwhile, user-centric service designers remain dangerously close to been complicit in perpetuating economic systems which are at the root of social inequality and racism.

We invite participants to reckon with the politics of their practices by playing with the *Workers Tarot*, to share stories of recent projects they have worked on. And from there, consider how designing (for) services is in great part designing service work. We will use the deck to discuss ethical dilemmas for service designers and envision practices based on solidarity with service workers.

The *Workers Tarot* builds upon the visual/semiotic system of Jodorowsky's “Tarot de Marseille” and is structured in five card categories: Worker Archetypes (Major Arcana) and the four suits (Minor Arcana): Things (diamonds), Theories (spades), History (hearts), and Trends (clubs). Rather than fictitious personas, the cards portray real workers' stories

collected from different media picturing them with candor, affection and respect. The *Workers Tarot* wants to trigger intuitive/sensitive/emotional thinking elicited by the Tarot's mystique of divination and future projections of the self, pushing practitioners to prefigure future practices based on solidarity principles.

Keywords: service workers, tarot, prefiguration, future practices, solidarity