“an excellent, thought-provoking session on Big Data: it kept people’s attention right to the end” AMP, Sydney
“an insightful, engaging, and charismatic jury chairman” Stylepark AG, Curator, Audi Urban Future Award
“an inspiring presentation for our executive workshop” Ikea
“you lifted the conference and discussion to a high level” Oslo Architecture Triennale
“our high-level guests greatly appreciated your challenging talk” T-Mobile
“your lecture created an enormous buzz” Vision2020 Leicester
“you challenged us to look outside the square for inspiration” Queensland Tourism

The world is not short of ideas, so why invite me as a speaker? I like Marcel Proust’s explanation: “the real act of discovery consists not in finding new lands, but in seeing with new eyes”.

I come to your event wearing three hats: a philosophy hat, a storytelling one, and a design hat. The philosopher in me asks: "what’s the most important question here?" As a storyteller, I describe the inspiring work of real people, in different parts of the world, who are doing things differently. Finally, with my design hat on, I discuss how these innovations might be improved upon, with which partners, and how.

Whether you are involved in energy, water, food, production, transport, or information, there are boundless opportunities for innovation where social innovation and ecological systems meet. Key questions arise across all these domains: How to connect with actors outside our tent, or silo? What new tools are platforms are available? How to work with new partners who may well have different agendas and cultures?

The benefits to you? A shared perception of new opportunities, and a determination to make something happen.

I do big-picture keynote talks for cities, companies, universities, and institutions. I often chair events. People seem to enjoy my Q+A interviews. A combination talk + xskool workshop gives us more time together. A Mentorcard (see below) enables follow-up calls and skype sessions.
Topics For 2014

WHAT MAKES A CHANGE LAB SUCCESSFUL?
A top-down, control-minded approach is not the best way to transform social and ecological systems. A better way is to ‘seed’ the edges of a system with small experiments. But how? What are the best ways to support, connect and amplify these experiments? The talk is based on change labs from the worlds of government, health, energy, food, and mobility. Keywords: collaborative services; enabling platforms; civic labs; franchising. Sample: my keynote at Lift is here.

ALIVE! LIVING SYSTEMS AS INFRASTRUCTURE
As we transition from hard to living concepts of infrastructure, soils, trees, and water have become signs of a city’s health, not an intrusion to be excluded. With stories about food co-ops, river restoration, edible forestry, pollinator pathways, and many more. Keywords: smart cities; infrastructure; living systems; social innovation. Sample: my keynote at Poptech! is here.

SHARE MORE, BUILD LESS - RE-THINKING MOBILITY
Driving a two ton truck to collect a ten ounce pizza may be normal now - but to our children, when they old enough to drive, it will sound like madness. In the sustainable mobility now emerging, citizens use the power of networks to share equipment and infrastructure in radically lighter ways. Keywords: energy; land use; time and space; resource sharing; smart cities; law of locality. Sample text: Audi Urban Future Award (I chaired the international jury in 2012)

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM - THE NEXT GENERATION
Inspired by the sharing economy, a new generation of ‘leave things better’ ecotourism connects meaningfully with local communities and improves the health of the living systems visited. Keywords: Active travel; P2P Travel; sharing economy; Fair Trade Tourism; Learning journeys; Green Grand Tour. Sample text: Green Tourism

HEALTH AND CARE - THE SOCIAL DIMENSION
In terms of time, ninety five percent of healthcare happens outside hospital or the doctor’s surgery - in the home, and in the community. Collaborative service networks are emerging- from child care, to dementia support - that empower people to work in equal and reciprocal relationship with professionals. Keywords: health; care; wellbeing; service innovation; social economy; participatory service networks; informal economy. Sample: My talk at Mayo Clinic is here

NEW WAYS OF KNOWING
Do pervasive media widen the disconnect between humans and the biosphere? With a sense of ecological responsibility towards future generations comes a respect for perceptual diversity and new ways of knowing. Keywords: cognition; ecological literacy. Sample: the text of my Puma Sustainable Design Lecture in London is here; the video of a recent lecture in Norway is here.

Other sample videos.
My recent talk (one hour) in Dundee, Scotland, is here. A six minute sequence of highlights is here.

Online Talks
This simple but effective online format works well if you need a change of pace in your workshop, retreat, or conference. Sometimes we send a 10-30 minute video lecture ahead of time, that you download; or we can do the whole session live on Skype or FaceTime. The technical set-up at your end does not need to be complicated – but it helps a lot if someone on your side (not the event chair or facilitator) has the job of communicating with John before and during the live session.

Some recent online sessions:
- foreign ministry officials at a strategy seminar in The Netherlands;
- managers at an innovation workshop in Belgium;
- design educators at their annual conference in the US;
- architects at a festival in Brazil;
- interactive media professionals at a seminar in Hong Kong.

Mentorcard

A Mentorcard buys you an agreed amount of time for more informal interactions through the year – by email, phone, Skype – or lunch.

Testimonials

AMP: “An excellent thought provoking session on Big Data which kept people’s attention right to the end. It prompted many questions and created an intensive debate.” Munib Karavdic, Director, Design & Innovation, Customer Solutions

Queensland Tourism: John Thackara took me on a ‘design’ journey to see opportunities & challenged me to look outside the square for solutions & inspiration.” David Morgans, Director Destination & Market Development

Ikea: “For our executive workshop on ‘IKEA in 2020’, John introduced us to a variety of low-tech but smart solutions that offered a better everyday life for the many, not just for the few. It was an inspiring presentation” Mikael Ydholm, Range Strategist, IKEA

TNT: “a thought leader who provoked us with outside-in, future-related, concepts and opinions” Arthur van Veen, Divisional Director, TNT Express Specialist Services.

Schiphol Airport: “Your presentation had a substantial influence in defining our board’s aspiration to redefine the airport”. Hubert-Jan Henket, supervisor of architecture and city planning for Schiphol Airport.

Cognis: “John Thackara’s presentation at our annual innovation awards was inspiring” Dr. Antonio Trius, Geschäftsführer (CEO) Cognis

T-Mobile: “Our high-level guests greatly appreciated John’s challenging talk – and it continues to generate lively discussion internally”. Wolfgang Hisserich, Vice President International, T-Mobile

European Carton Makers Association: “Your presentation gave our conference the positive energy it needs to face the difficult challenges ahead”. Jules Lejeune, Secretary-General, ECMA

Vision2020 Leicester: “Your inspirational key note address created an enormous buzz and gave people an insight into how people making small changes can have big impacts. Sue Tilley, Head of Inward Investment, Prospect Leicestershire Ltd

BBC: “a broader perspective on how the world’s largest public service organisation might contribute to designing social change. John’s contribution made several senior producers re-evaluate their editorial propositions” Adam Powers, Head of Design for BBC Interactive Factual and Learning.

UnBox Festival, New Delhi: “invaluable insights: our festival got an overwhelmingly positive response”
Lift: “John challenged us to rethink innovation, its goals, its processes, and its stakeholders. With a combination of wit, concrete examples and analysis, he opened up wholly new possibilities”. Daniel Kaplan, co-director of LIFT Marseille

Global Place: “John was asked to set the tone on ecology and technology at our centennial conference. He did so admirably and compellingly. He’s clearly a key player in the international dialogue on the future of the planet. Douglas Kelbaugh Faia, Dean and Professor, Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Michigan

Aspen Design Summit: “John was a gracious and engaged host with such a well-crafted, sharp, pay-attention-or-you’ll-miss-it wit, it ran like footnotes beneath his intelligent commentary” mediabistro.com

In The Blogosphere

La Republica, Italy: “an authority and thought-leader for a generation of designers”
Rhizome: “top dog in the space of flows”
Terra Economica: “le pape du design” (“the pope of design”)
Allan Chochinov, Core77: ”a provocative, fulfilling evening…what a delight”
Andrew Guest, Edinburgh: “a tour de force around the potential of design to make a better world”
Advertising-information.com ”an extraordinary, candid and inspiring keynote”
Antony Townsend, Institute for the Future: “a treat…a wonderful address”
Dan Sturges: ‘the top design thinker on the planet”

CONTACT

If you would like me to speak at or facilitate your event, please email john (at) doorsofperception(dot) com