

CRITICAL ARTEFACT METHODS: USING PROVOCATIVE CONCEPTUAL DESIGNS WITHIN PARTICIPATORY HUMAN-CENTRED DESIGN

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In this workshop participants will have hands-on experience of ‘critical artefact methods’. Through practical experience of these design methods and discussion of their underlying methodology, we intend to generate debate about the use of ‘critical artefacts’ (the products of critical design and related practices) within human-centred and participatory design processes, and enable designers to explore how they could utilise similar techniques in their own practice.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years a movement has developed that focusses on claiming design as a medium for critique, such as Critical Design (Dunne 1999, Dunne & Raby 2001), Poetic Design (Naylor & Ball 2005) and similar practices. Rather than being mass manufactured and sold, the products of these practices, ‘critical artefacts’ (as they might be termed), are often disseminated via exhibition and publication with the intention of provoking critical reflection in their audiences. But how might this critical reflection be used more instrumentally to directly inform a design process?

If such critical reflection prompts designers and stakeholders to consider broader possibilities for the roles and practices afforded by designed artefacts, how might this be employed as a form of human-centred design where the aim is to go beyond narrow definitions of ‘user’ and ‘use’ – such as supporting human dignity (Buchanan 2001). And how might critical artefacts be used as a form of Participatory Design which has both political and technical features (Ehn & Badham 2002) –

producing effective products whilst honouring the values and capabilities of their users.

The author has developed and applied practical methods using critical artefacts to develop human-centred products ideas. Through presentation of these design methods, their supporting methodology and practical exercises, this workshop will generate discussion of how designers might employ similar tactics in their own professional practice.

INTENDED PARTICIPANTS

This workshop would be of interest to designers and design academics wishing to explore new participatory design methods, their underlying rationale, and the potential implications for design practice. We anticipate a group of around 12 participants.

GOALS

- Provide participants with an overview of Critical Design (and related practices);
- Debate possible uses of ‘critical artefacts’ in human-centred design and participatory design;
- Propose practical design methods and a supporting methodology;
- Provide ‘hands-on’ experience of critical artefact methods in a collaborative workshop environment;
- Stimulate designers’ insight into applications within their own practice utilising critical artefacts.

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

The workshop will consist of alternating sessions of presentations and practical ‘hands-on’ activities. The presentations will include an introduction to relevant existing practice and theory, a discussion of the proposed design methods (using case study examples), and a proposed methodology supporting these methods.

In the practical activities, participants will use the proposed 'critical artefact methods' in simulated design projects. Participants will be provided with a briefing document prior to the workshop and requested to bring hypothetical design projects on which to apply critical artefact methods.

In groups, participants will devise critical artefacts to explore their chosen hypothetical project's context, using basic materials (such as paper, cardboard, blue foam and modelling clay) to produce 'mock-ups'. They will also produce 'storyboards' to present narratives of their critical artefacts' use. Groups will then alternate presenting their artefacts and playing the role of stakeholders discussing them. Finally a second round of designing a second set of artefacts will be used to 'process' the stakeholder discussions and express their understanding of the design contexts.

Time permitting, the workshop materials may be used to create a small exhibition to illustrate critical artefact methods and prompt further debate in the remainder of the conference.

SCHEDULE

- 09:00 Welcome and participant introductions
- 09:15 Presentation: *Critical Design Practices and Participatory Design*
- 09:45 Group activity: present design contexts
- 10:00 Presentation: *Critical Artefact Methods*
Including case study design project and proposed methodology part 1.
- 10.30 Group activity: choose design contexts and devise critical artefacts
- 12:00 Lunch
- 14:00 Group activity: stakeholder presentation role-play - groups alternate presenting artefacts and playing stakeholders
- 15:00 Presentation: *Processing Stakeholder Engagement via Designing*
Including case study examples and proposed methodology part 2.
- 15:30 Group activity: designing further artefacts to reflect on 'stakeholder' presentation.
- 16:30 Plenary discussion: *How might you use similar tactics in your practice?*
- 17:00 Close

RELEVANCE TO THE FIELD

There is much interest in the work of certain designers and artists as producing a form of 'design-for-debate' – critical commentaries on the nature of design and its affects on society – for example the exhibitions *Designing Critical Design* (Z33 2007) and *Wouldn't it be Nice...* (Somerset House 2008). However the idea of using critical artefacts not simply as *outputs* of such practices but more instrumentally to *inform* an ongoing design process has not been greatly discussed. Over the last six years the author has developed such an approach within his own design practice (Bowen 2007, 2008, 2009). The intention of this workshop is to increase

understanding of methods utilising similar principles and generate debate in this area.

ORGANISERS

Simon Bowen has developed critical artefact methods over the last six years and applied them in funded design research projects with colleagues from Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield. This work has led to further funded research projects and the creation of a research collaboration between Design and Health research centres at Sheffield Hallam University. For the last three years he has also tutored a series of practical workshops on the use of artefacts in research at the Sint-Lucas School of Architecture, Brussels.

Peter Wright is Professor of Human-centred Design at Sheffield Hallam University with 20 years' experience developing new methods for studying human-technology interactions including methods based on the principles of distributed cognition, participatory design, and experience-centred design. In 2003 he co-edited *Funology* which characterised the state of the art in affective interaction design, and in 2004 he co-authored *Technology as Experience* which sets out conceptual and philosophical foundations for understanding user experience.

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