Editorial: Philosophical Tools in Design Research: from empirical turn to practical turn

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Collaboration between Design Research and Philosophy of Technology seems very promising. The reflective, philosophical perspective brings the societal implications of design to the fore and this is an interesting focus for reinforcing research approaches for design. Since the philosophy of technology in the current of the ‘empirical turn’ aims to study concrete technologies and contexts, contributions from philosophy to design have become all the more feasible. Design Research can use the frameworks of philosophers to theorize the findings from practice, to make sense of the past, and for ethical reflection on the impacts of design and the moral responsibilities of designers. Or, still more practical, philosophical insights in the relationships between humans and technology can contribute to design for usability and design for behaviour change. On the other hand, the practice of designing actual things provides a laboratory for putting philosophical frameworks to the test and to use in the real world.

Following the ‘empirical turn’ before, the present search for collaboration with design can be termed a ‘practical turn’ in the philosophy of technology (as will be further elaborated in the first paper, by Eggink and Dorrestijn). Under this notion of a practical turn in the philosophy of technology this track brings together papers which are in one way or another about ‘philosophical tools in design research’. All research projects apply insights from philosophy of technology to real world problems and design solutions; or the other way around, they use insights from philosophy of technology to reflect on designs that were actually made.

We will now give an overview of the papers in which we mention the tools and philosophical backgrounds used in each paper. So diverse as the philosophical tools are, so are the design contexts: from service design to infant healthcare, and from the physical to the digital, the emotional and the political. The order of the papers is from the more practical to the more reflective papers, with a more general perspective in the first and the last paper.

The first paper Philosophy of Technology x Design: The Practical Turn (Wouter Eggink & Steven Dorrestijn) – apart from elaborating on the theme of the track – reports on applying the approach of technical mediation (Peter-Paul Verbeek, Don Ihde, Bruno Latour) to design projects by way of the Product Impact Tool.
In *Service Fictions through Actant Switching* Sarah Marie Foley and Dan Lockton present and show the combined use of two tools called Actant Switching and Service Fictions. Foley and Lockton refer to the work by philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour on what is known as Actor-Network Theory.

Next follows *The Use of Philosophy of Technology in Design: A Research-Through-Design Case of Treatment Compliance* (about the treatment of infants with clubfoot) by Jonne van Belle, Bob Giesberts and Wouter Eggink. Their main reference in the philosophy of technology is Mediation Theory (Verbeek) and the Product Impact Tool (Dorrestijn).

*Turning Philosophy with a Speculative Lathe: Object Oriented Ontology, Carpentry, and Design Fiction* by Joseph Lindley, Paul Coulton and Haider Akmal introduces another philosophical strain: Object Oriented Ontology (Graham Harman, Ian Bogost). Their application domain is the Internet of Things.

Then, *Aestheticising Change: Simulations of Progress* by Chad Story and Jocelyn Bailey extends our endeavour to the political domain. With reference to concepts by the philosopher Jacques Rancière they explore how design practice becomes part of the way public sector actors negotiate, envision and catalyse change in relation to public ‘problems’.

Also more reflective in nature is *Using the Product Impact Tool for Prospective Thinking* (Thomas Raub, Steven Dorrestijn & Wouter Eggink), which explores the wider application of philosophical tools in prospective studies. The paper shows some of the potential of this direction by a case study on the future of automated driving.

Second-to-last paper *Using Heterotopias to Characterise Interactions in Physical/Digital Spaces* by Haider Ali Akmal and Paul Coulton addresses the complexity of designing interactions in hybrid digital/physical spaces, using the notion of heterotopia as a philosophical lens ‘borrowed’ from Michel Foucault.

The last paper *DRS Conferences: barometer and mirror of theoretical reflection of design discipline* by Alejandra Poblete provides an overview of theoretical concepts in design research by looking at the DRS conferences over the years. One of the aims that this track wanted to bring to the fore with the collaboration of the two disciplines was not only making philosophy of technology more practical, but also making design research more reflective. Therefore, this contribution nicely suits as a conclusion to the track, not by elaborating yet another philosophical design tool, but by showing the presence of “reflection in design” in a context of design research history.

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