

MAPPING THE DESIGN APPARATUS

AN INTERACTIVE EXPLORATION AND CRITIQUE OF DESIGN THINKING

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WORKSHOP ABSTRACT: Over the past several decades, the practice of design has benefited from tremendous growth in interest, study, and application. The principles, practices, and methods of design, often summed up simply as “design thinking,” have been adopted by an increasingly wide range of academic domains and professional applications. Despite design’s growth, analysis of design culture – the things we think, say, and do – reveals a converging philosophical agreement.

While this converging philosophical trajectory may appear to be a positive transcendence towards creating a stable, agreed upon body of knowledge, the results are concerning. The design hegemony has not only disenfranchised members of the design community (Bethune, 2022), but has led to stale aesthetic and experiential paradigms – product categories that remain unchanged while speaking only to the small group of creators in power. What are we missing when the systems we use are designed by a privileged, largely homogenous majority? What is the impact to culture and personal experience with technology? What is the impact to our experience with each other?

Keywords: Design thinking, Design culture, Design apparatus, Speculative, Principles and Practices

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As a community of practice, we share similar objectives, promote shared principles, and utilize consistent design methods. Similarly, design practitioners generally adhere to overwhelmingly analogous design process frameworks—cyclical phases of problem-framing, opportunity identification, ideation, and development. A careful analysis of design discourse reveals a culture of acceptance. We are largely saying the same thing. We propose an interactive workshop to interrogate the accepted truisms of design—the principles and practices we advocate and adhere to—and to ask: What are we missing?

2. WORKSHOP OUTLINE

2.1 WORKSHOP INTRODUCTION – 5 MINUTES

Workshop moderators will provide a short visual presentation of the topic, including background material and primary workshop objectives:

Background. Victor Papanek suggested we take up the challenges of design through will-power and personal moral objectives—a level of individualism we feel denies our social being. Margolin and Margolin, on the other hand, suggested designers focus primarily on social work—an approach we believe limits the impact of design to restricted domains of creative possibility. Rather than focus on

moral individualism or specific design domains, we propose re-evaluating the guideposts for design decision making—the processes and principles we promote, share, and believe in.

Objectives. This workshop is intended to explore the shortcomings of current design practice and develop a working set of new design principles to overcome these challenges.

2.2 DESIGN PROCESS MAPPING + PRINCIPLES – 15 MINUTES

Working individually, workshop participants will use materials provided (e.g., poster board, markers, abstract shapes, verbiage) to visualize their ideal design process. The first ten minutes will allow participants to visualize their proposed design process, mapping out the steps they believe are most important for successful design outcomes. At the ten-minute mark, the workshop moderators will prompt participants to reflect on the principles they consider throughout the design process—the fundamental truths that provide the foundation or reasoning for each step of their proposed design process. This exercise is intended for participants to consider the question: Why is this step important to achieving good design? Examples of design principles will be provided for consideration (e.g., develop a strong understanding of prospective users), and participants will be tasked with adding their proposed principles to their design process maps.

2.3 GROUP SHARE + PRESENT – 15 MINUTES

Working in small groups (6–8 participants, depending on the number of people), participants will share their process maps with each other, highlighting the design principles that provide the foundation (the why) for each step of their ideal design process. The collaborative sharing is intended to expose participants to divergent design principles and practices, opening each other up to alternatives ‘ways of knowing and doing.’

2.4 PRIMING – 5 MINUTES

The moderators will provide a cursory review of design challenges outlined in design scholarship—challenges that are the result of historical practices and propagated through accepted truisms. These challenges will prime participants for the subsequent activity.

2.5 NEW PRINCIPLES FOR ALTERNATIVE DESIGN FUTURES – 10 MINUTES

What principles are we missing? Working in groups, participants will be tasked with developing new design principles focused on addressing the challenges outlined above. Using the maketools (poster boards, markers, etc.) provided, groups will collaborate to visualize their design principles for the future. Several questions will provide the prompt for their visualizations:

- How will your new design principle affect workplace experiences or practices?
- What benefits will your new design principles have on the things you design?
- How will your new design principles affect aesthetic decisions? If so, how?

2.6 GROUP PRESENTATIONS – 10 MINUTES

Finally, groups will present the results of their new principles envisioning exercise to all workshop participants. The results will be documented for review and analysis, providing the foundation for design principles that thoughtfully address challenges facing design culture today.

3. REFERENCES

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