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Anticipating Mediations through Design Fiction

The theory of technological mediation is of increasing interest for both philosophers and designers. For postphenomenology, the commitments of design offer methodologies to ground and concretize postphenomenological concepts. For designers, postphenomenology offers a theoretical framework to analyze human-technology relations. Beyond the functionality and use of designed technologies, postphenomenology views technologies as transformative mediators of human-world relations and allows designers to assess their mediating effects. Due to the ways in which mediations affect how people relate to the world, design can be considered a material form of doing ethics. As such, the role of the designer expands with the responsibility of anticipating mediations of yet-to-be-designed technologies. According to Verbeek, "the ethics of design will need to anticipate the future mediating role of the technology-in-design." However, due to the complexity of human-technology relations, the multistability of technologies, and the appropriations of users, anticipating mediations is a difficult task. Similarly, most design methods focus on functionality and use and, as such, fail to account for unintended consequences. In response to these shortcomings, this workshop introduces design fiction as an accessible, collaborative, and productive approach for anticipating technological mediations.

Design fiction is a type of discursive design that, rather than aiming for pragmatic solutions, prioritizes the exploration of matters of concern. It suggests ways in which speculative technologies and possible worlds can be imagined, prototyped, and communicated. Further, the worldbuilding and storytelling opportunities of design fiction afford a potential space to create a range of excess relations that go beyond prescribed technological mediations. We critically ask what it means to anticipate mediations and if there is philosophical value to design fiction for anticipating mediations. As such, we attempt to frame design fiction as an experimental way of doing philosophy.

Our workshop welcomes philosophers and researchers who have never encountered design fiction to participate in activities and discussions with designers. The workshop consists of four parts. We begin with a pedagogical stance in regards to design fiction; presenting the theoretical background of design fiction, related concepts of speculative design, value fictions, and value scenarios. We delineate design fiction from science fiction and present noteworthy examples in academic, commercial, and filmic works. We then transition to a group activity to design fictional prototypes and worlds using a variety of mediums and methods. Participants will then reflect on their designed fictions and evaluate design fiction as a means of anticipating mediations through reflection and discussions. We end the workshop with an open discussion about additional findings and future implications for postphenomenology and design fiction.