

A too hasty reaction, in the form of an uncurated set of notes (disorganized, repetitive), obviously only based on the excerpt and your editorial statement.

I was unfortunately disappointed and bit frustrated. Hopefully that doesn't really matter to you.

What are these? You insist that they are not predictions, but obviously their rhetorical force lies in their predictiveness. This is why it is of interest to you that they are so plausible as to already exist in some cases, or be wanted by people on the other. The whole methodology evidenced by the (expectation management) charts at the end indicates to me that you are trying to find a way of accessing more likely futures that lie in the messy mundane rather than the shiny shiny or ruin porn. If they provoke a reaction as you hope, it will be because readers see them as likely near futures that they feel the need to take a position on.

So I am not sure why you are so adamant about them not being predictions. This seems to be a phobia within Futures. The whole document seemed to me much more within the discourse of futures than in design – artifacts from the futures materialized in present contexts rather than futurescan reports, etc. I am more interested in the practice of design and in particular the nature of design research within the practice of design. As I was trying argue with the DnR review, I think that there is a designerly responsibility to imagine 'the traffic and not just the car,' and your vignettes do that, though not in a way that I feel designers would find productive, though I will have to think about why I think that more.

If these are not predictions, they must be doing something else. There is a way in which they are commentary, revelatory of current values driving the domestication of technoscience. Like DnR, you shun any risk of seeming didactic, but there is a way in which this document can be read as a catalogue of criticisms of bourgeois consumerist values. However, the insistence that this is a catalogue of futures resists that reading.

If these are not future predictions or present critiques, what are they? You are most insistent that these are provocations.

So three questions: Do they provoke? What do they provoke? Provoke to do what?

I'm afraid that for me, the catalogue framing makes these very unprovocative. If I am in a shopping mindset, then my predilection is to think that they are dumb and put the catalogue in the trash – nothing for me to buy there. There is a way in which the mundane realism of the advertorial voice blunts the need to confront these plausible futures.

But I'm a pretentious wanker, so maybe they provoke another audience. I wonder about your targeting – as opposed to the generic viral 2nd and 3rd hand pick-up. There is kind of race-class politics to the catalogue. I don't just mean that most of the people and scenarios are very white – though I suppose that's the global consumer class now. I mean that no self-respecting technoliterate urban liberal looks at catalogues, or if they do, buys from them. They might look at an in-flight 'innovations' catalogue, but yours doesn't quite have that aesthetic. So maybe this catalogue is more lower-middle-class or not-quite-'white.' I'm on dangerously politically incorrect ground, but am just trying to think aloud about who might be provoked by these scenarios, and how this communication would actually get to such people.

What the propositions seem to provoke about is mostly a social consequence of a technology. The catalogue form has forced you to approach the future in terms of things. The scenarios do try to get beyond that gadget-centrism toward the place where social values meet technological infrastructures – I liked the gestures toward different investment-innovation-manufacturing processes and locales – but in the end this a collection of discrete objects more or less at domestic scale. It wasn't your intention to cover this, but I do worry when techno-thing futurism conceals more conventional larger scale sociocultural factors – religious fundamentalism, indentured servitude, etc.

I worry because the thing-based version of technology strikes me as a useful ideology, one that downplays technology as an economic system, let alone an ontology. Device-centrism is like the Thatcher of technology: “there is no ‘the technology,’ just individual products you can choose to buy or not, so calm down.”

There is a danger here that far from provoking, the catalogue is doing a fantastic job deprovoking, by explicitly making structural systems into more or less plausible, because tolerably broken, mundanities. Can't the catalogue be read as a softening up? If not to this or that technology, then to the overall inevitability (again Thatcher – There is No Alternative) of these kinds of technologies. “There will be autonomous vehicles; that is so irresistible that we couldn't even imagine how to make it interesting enough to include in the catalogue – but you do get to choose the color, or whether the vehicle is driving your kids to school or your dog to the park, and so on.” Choice but just not the ability to choose none.

Lastly, as is my main problem with DnR: so let's say I am provoked, about things that are of concern not only to me now; what do I do with that provocation? DnR and the Tharps insist that they are generating debate and discourse – but where, how? Who is being assembled, to talk in what ways, to who? Is the forum on FB or Twitter? Will the NY Times run a roundtable? Or do I have to get Stamps and do a Masters degree?

I am not sure we need more things to be provoked about, but we sure as hell as need much more quality design of times and places in which provocations can be mobilized into either resistance or at least deflection.

Some textual examples of what I'm talking about:

We imagined it to be a catalog of some sort, as might appear in a street vending box in any neighborhood, or in a pile next to the neighborhood real estate guides or advertising-based classified newspapers near the entrance to your local convenience store.

What class of people are making use of these kinds of catalogues?

we wanted to present the results of our workshop in a form that had the potential to feel as immersive as an engaging, well-told story. We wanted our insights to exist as if they were an object or an experience that might be found in the world we were describing for our client. We wanted our client to receive our insights with the shift in perspective that comes when one is able to suspend their disbelief as to what is possible.

So that what? When clients or others experience your speculations in this way, what happens? What's the theory of change? How will things be different when futures are received in these ways as oppose to how they currently are?

What we were striving to achieve was a kind of rich production design and a thorough visual-narrative context through which one might find some space to imagine, question, and extend the core characteristics of our insights into thought-provocations. We did not want to assume what would become the future and what 'exciting' technologies of the day would find their way into our lives, mindlessly disregarding the probably costs and consequences. We wanted to offer up a cast of props that could provoke conversations about what kind of futures we may want, and what kind of futures we may not want.

I am not sure that a thick catalogue leaves space? DnR have this poorly articulated vision of incomplete things inspiring audience completion, but your approach presents things that are much more finished, even down to advertising scenario.

the products and services and "ways of being" were extrapolated, but people still worried about finding a playmate for their kid and getting out of debt. As prevalent as ever were the shady promises of a better, fitter, sexier body and new tinctures to prevent the resilient common cold. People in our near future were looking for ways to avoid boredom, to be told a story, find the sport scores or place a bet, get from here to there, avoid unpleasantries, protect their loved ones and buy a pair of trousers. Tomorrow ended up very much the same as today, only the 19 of us were less "there" than the generations destined to inherit the world designed by the TBD Catalog.

I am in general agreement here. Futurism always overplays change and the inertia of social practices is underestimated. But there is a danger here. Any futures document is also wittingly or not suggesting that certain versions of normality will or should persist. Your catalogue is filled with very white middle class scenarios that are therefore normalized as hegemonic. It would have been good to see more diversity being normalized, for political but also just factual reasons given BRIC-based futures.

the CEO's wives color-choice whims

As an example of the previous point, this gender stereotyping – CEOs are heterosexual males with superficial partners – needs to be edited out.

the Design Fiction process has real value as a decision-making tool. How does this process become a decision-making tool? It becomes a tool through its ability to

present things that could be and allowing them to create their own context, to “speak” about the world in which they exist, to describe their own world however indirectly, however implicitly.

I really wanted an answer to this question about how Design Fiction = Decision Tool. Your answer is a bit Kahn meets Kevin Kelly – what does the brick/technology want. In other words, Design Fictions involve entering the lifeworld of a product-based future like an actor and then improvising as that thing to feel for the consequences? If this is the (practice-based design research) explanation, I wanted a lot more articulation. But it is an answer that points out the importance of Design Fictions to designers, not to consumers of a shopping catalogue.

a field guide to the democratized, everyday-ordinary aspirations, concerns, problems, ambitions of some multivalent near future cultures.

Democracy? How? Where? Who?

We don't do this because we are “against” 3D printers, or autonomous flying robots, or a world of connected dresser drawers. (It makes as much sense to be against such things as to be against breakfast. Some breakfasts are have normative value.)

This is one of those TINA moments. I am against 3D printers, and work to ensure that they do not arrive as sources of plastic waste – what I was calling Prefigurative Criticism toward the end of the DnR review.