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# Design Fictions Studio Proposal

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**Abstract**

This studio provides participants with an opportunity to engage in a hands-on exploration of the use of "design fictions" as a strategy for producing physical artifacts. The idea of design fictions blurs the boundaries between traditional design practices and narrative explorations of potential futures. If the goal of design is to devise courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones, then the goal of design fiction is to use speculations, metaphors, and explorations of desired futurities to explicate and inform material design practices. Participants will have a chance to discuss these ideas, as well as to design and build their own "diegetic prototypes" out of materials sourced from local antique shops, thrift stores, and other nearby sources of inspiration. Through this hands-on exploration of the constraints and affordances of fictional scenarios and scavenged materials, we hope to collectively explore a compelling new design space for tangibles.

**Keywords**

design fiction, tangible user interfaces, design practice

## Introduction

The goal of this studio is to provide participants with an opportunity to engage in a hands-on exploration of the use of “design fictions” as a strategy for producing physical artifacts. We will provide participants with a framework for putting the theoretical discussion of design fictions into practice, and with the tools and materials to create playful and imaginative tangible interfaces. Participants will have a chance to design and build their own “diegetic prototypes” [4] out of materials sourced from local antique shops, thrift stores, and other nearby sources of inspiration.

The studio theme of *design fiction* is a somewhat recent theoretical development that blurs the boundaries between traditional design practices and narrative explorations of potential futures. If the goal of design is, as Herbert Simon has written, to devise courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones [6], then the goal of design fiction is to use speculations, metaphors, and explorations of desired futurities to explicate and inform material design practices. At the same time, as Bruce Sterling has framed them, design fictions allow practices of design to inform the creation of fictional scenarios that better explore the implications of technological artifacts on human society [7]. The writings of Dourish, Bell, and Bleecker will be used as a starting point for exploring how fiction can inform and inspire design in this studio [1-3]. We will discuss how different genres of fiction open up different design spaces, including a consideration of Science Fiction [1-3; 7], Fantasy and Paranormal Fiction [8] and Steampunk [5]. Designing

physical objects to fit a fictional world can be a form of exploration, critique, commentary, or celebration. Fictional design embodies a set of values and ideas, allowing for more nuanced and concrete exploration of the implications of imagined scenarios.

To ground this discussion in practice we will present some examples of our own work, including *The Reading Glove*, which draws on the fictional notion of Psychometry (or object reading) as well as design fictions found within Steampunk [9-10]. We will also consider how design-fictional practices can be understood within a context of “everyday design” [11-12].

The Design Fictions Studio draws on these ideas to inform a practical process of tangible interface design. Participants are encouraged to bring in old and broken pieces of technology that they want to hack, mod, and re-imagine through the lens of a design fiction. Through this hands-on exploration of the constraints and affordances of fictional scenarios and scavenged materials, we hope to collectively explore a compelling new design space for tangibles.

## Studio Proposal

The first hour of the studio will be used for introductions and a discussion of what design fiction means and what the opportunities are for connecting this idea to tangible interface design. Individuals and groups of participants will brainstorm the kind of design fiction they want to explore. Participants will be encouraged to develop a scenario within a familiar genre that can be used to motivate design. The second and third hours will be dedicated to physical prototyping of design fiction ideas and the creation of

diegetic prototypes. In the final hour, as we begin to wind down everyone will have a chance to share their created artifacts and fictional worlds with each other, and discuss how the act of designing informed the fictional scenario and vice-versa.

Expected skills:

- No particular skills are required, aside from a willingness to imaginatively explore the possibilities of material objects.

Expected preparation:

- Participants are expected to arrive with some interest in imagining fictional worlds and ideas for what they might like to design.
- Participants should plan to bring at least one "inspiration object" with them to contribute to the group pool. Participants should not bring objects that they are emotionally attached to, as the goal is to re-appropriate them into new designs.
- Participants are also encouraged to bring hand and light power tools, and supplies like glue, tape, and paint. Some basics will be supplied, and opportunities to acquire objects to work with are built into the workshop.

### **Studio Topics**

- Design Fictions: What it means, what it could mean, and how it applies to making things

- Hands-on Experience: Choosing, manipulating and building found objects into imaginative technology
- Vision Sharing: Conveying fictional worlds and design concepts to others via descriptions and physical artifacts.

### **Studio Learning Goals**

The aim of this studio is to engage participants in exploring imaginative design theory and practice. The goals of our studio include:

- To spark a wide-ranging conversation on the relationship between technology design and fictional worlds and texts.
- To engage in hands-on learning of how to design with found materials for an imaginative goal.
- To build connections amongst people with a range of visions, insights, and skills.

### **Studio Dissemination and Future Engagement**

The design fiction artifacts created for this studio will be placed on display during TEI, and the creation process will be documented and presented back to the TEI community.

### **Studio Supporting Web Documents**

A good introduction to the notion of design fiction can be found in the online essay "Design Fiction: A Short Essay on Design, Science, Fact and Fiction" by Julian

Bleeker on the Near Future Laboratory site, and the related slideshow on slideshare.net [1-2].

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