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# Workshop Proposal: Alternate Endings: Using Fiction to Explore Design Futures

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**Topic and rationale**

Inherent in the design of all technology is a speculative story told by the designer about the future in which that technology exists and operates. The striking feature of the future imagined by HCI researchers and practitioners, is that it is often simplistic, short term, and focused on utility. It rarely acknowledges the potential for complex, long-term, social and psychological consequences of technology development. In recent years, approaches such as reflective design, value centered design and critical design have been proposed as methods for eliciting more critical reflections on the implications of interactive technology. However, these approaches have had little effect on mainstream HCI literature, and ethics, values, and critical analysis remain a niche concern of the HCI community.

Interestingly, recent years have also seen much discussion of how speculative fiction influences the work of technology designers. For example, science fiction narratives and design fictions capture the imaginations of designers, and have often been deeply influential on their designs. Thus, we propose the use of fiction as a means for engaging designers in considerations of not only the creative potential of their work, but also the long term social and psychological

consequences. Thus, this workshop will explore questions such as:

- Can fiction engage designers in more critical examination of their own practices?
- How can we enable designers to draw on fiction as a resource?
- Are there identifiable benefits to the prevailing utilitarian HCI approach to envisioning the future?

### **Expected participants**

The journal *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing* recently published a special issue on science fiction. The journal *Design Futures* recently published a special issue on design fiction. MIT Media Lab now offers a class entitled "Science Fiction to Science Fabrication." This workshop is timely and of interest to a significant HCI audience and yet no workshop at CHI has previously addressed this topic.

The workshop aims to bring together interested academics from HCI, computer science, design and humanities to consider how critical, reflective and literary practices can help designers envision the long-term social and psychological consequences of interactive technology. In a challenging, interactive and playful workshop, participants will collaboratively write alternate endings for well-known HCI scenarios and papers. The intention is to engage not only those already interested in critical approaches to design, but to engage mainstream HCI researchers in more critical considerations of their work.

We will accept submissions in two forms. Option 1 is a standard 2-4 pages ACM extended abstract format position paper, where authors discuss how design

fiction relates to their own practice. Option 2 uses a similar format but for contributions that, themselves, are short works of design fiction. Authors are particularly encouraged to explore the long-term consequences of their own research projects.

### **Organisers**

**Conor Linehan** and **Ben Kirman** are both Lecturers at the Lincoln Social Computing Research Centre, where their research explores the design of technology for facilitating provocative and critical experiences.

**Mark Blythe** is a Professor of Interdisciplinary Design at Northumbria University. He is an ethnographer with a background in literary and critical theory.

**Stuart Reeves** is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Nottingham's Mixed Reality Lab. His work primarily explores the routine and practical ways in which technology is used or performed with in public and semi-public environments.

**Ron Wakkary** is a Professor in the School of Interactive Arts and Technology (SIAT) at Simon Fraser University, where he established the Everyday Design Studio.

**Audrey Desjardins** is a PhD student at SIAT, Simon Fraser University. Her interests focus Everyday Design, sustainable interaction design, the DIY and Maker movement and design fictions.

**Joshua Tanenbaum** is a PhD Candidate at Simon Fraser University, whose work includes research into Interactive Narrative, Method Acting, Maker and DIY cultures, and design fiction. His work explores science

fictional scenarios through the creation of diegetic prototypes.

### **Program Committee**

The workshop will have an international program committee, including both HCI and humanities researchers, will provide expert advice, participate in the workshop, and help to establish an ongoing community for HCI research in this area:

- Shaun Lawson, University of Lincoln
- Dan O'Hara, Birmingham City University
- Luke Robert Mason, Birmingham City University
- Madeline Ashbey, practicing science fiction writer
- Murray Goulden, University of Nottingham
- Lisa P. Nathan, University of British Columbia

### **Conducting the workshop**

We propose a one-day workshop.

**Before:** This workshop will provide the focal point for an inter-disciplinary conversation on the use of fiction as a resource for exploring ethics and values in the design of interactive technology. We will create a blog and twitter account and regularly post relevant links in order to publicise the workshop. Before the event, participants and organisers will be encouraged to post comments and short design fictions to the blog. The task on the day of the workshop will be given a specific focus (e.g. care for the elderly in 2050) and this theme will be decided through discussion on the blog. Accepted papers will be posted to the blog in advance of the workshop. A list of relevant publications will also be maintained on the blog.

**During:** We will facilitate an interactive, challenging, and playful workshop. Our activity involves collaboratively writing speculative "alternate endings" for well-known and influential CHI scenarios and papers. The day will begin with a short keynote from Toronto-based science fiction writer Madeline Ashbey on the process of writing design fiction. Attendees and organisers will then be split into groups. Card sorting will be used as a playful brainstorming activity for each group, matching narratives from popular science fiction films with contemporary research papers. Those groups will then work to draft short fictions that explore long-term consequences of well-known HCI scenarios and papers. Guidance on structuring those stories will be provided by the guest speaker and workshop organisers. The day will conclude with critical discussions based on the themes raised in the fictions generated, as well as a broader consideration of fiction as a resource for engaging in critical analyses of interaction design. In addition, the workshop will continue the discussion on critical practices in HCI that has emerged from the past number of CHI conferences.

**After:** Following this workshop we will prepare:

- A poster for the spotlight on workshops session.
- A workshop report for ACM Interactions Magazine.
- An edited book exploring fiction as a resource for understating ethics in technology design.

After the workshop we will update the blog to reflect the workshop outcomes. Both the materials submitted before the workshop and the stories generated during the event will be posted. We will continue to use the blog as a basis for ongoing discussion and community building activities.