

Criticism – for Computational Alternatives

Søren Bro Pold, Olav W. Bertelsen, Lone
Koefoed Hansen & Christian Ulrik Andersen
Participatory Information Technology
Aarhus University
{pold, olavb, koefoed, cua}@cs.au.dk

Shaowen Bardzell, Jeffrey Bardzell
The Cultural Research in Technology (CRIT)
Group, Indiana University–Bloomington, USA
{selu, jbardzel}@indiana.edu

ABSTRACT

Criticism is a reflection on the dialectical relation between content and technology, a relation that is often political, tied to Marxist dialectics or to other concepts of criticism from aesthetic and literary theory. This workshop will ask how we can bridge between criticism of technology and design. If we are to envision and design critical alternatives, how can critical approaches to technology help? What do we need to take from criticism, which concepts of criticism and how can they be applied?

Author Keywords

Criticism; Theory; Interfaces

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.2: User Interfaces Evaluation/methodology, User-centered design; H.1.2: User/Machine Systems, Human factors; D.2.2: User interfaces.

DESCRIPTION OF THE WORKSHOP

The last ten years have seen several attempts to introduce criticism into HCI/computing. We have seen notions from the field of new media, literary theory, pragmatism, marxist critical theory, etc. This workshop is meant to discuss and compare these critical perspectives in order to explore the purposes and potentials of criticism in computing.

Criticism is an activity that has developed in a close relation to aesthetics, e.g. via Kant's notion of critical judgment, John Dewey's concept of perception and experience or Walter Benjamin's understanding of art's relation to technical reproduction (1, 2, 3). Whereas Kant basically categorizes our experience into three categories helping us to distinguish between pure reason, practical reason and aesthetic judgment, both Dewey and Benjamin develop modern notions of experience taking their starting point in the idea that our experience has become impoverished or alienated in modern society, and that we need art to correct this. Both Dewey's pragmatism and Benjamin's critical theory furthermore distinguish themselves from other notions of experience, that experience is material and active, which can be seen as reasons why both Dewey and

Benjamin are relevant to practice based design thinking and critical design.

However, for Benjamin, it is equally important to develop a critical, dialectic perspective on media and technologies. In this way, the criticism is not only a question of content or use, but also a question of media and technology – or to be more precise: Criticism is a reflection on the dialectical relation between content and technology, a relation that is also political and tied to Marxist dialectics.

Starting from our different concepts of criticism, this workshop will ask how we can bridge between criticism of technology and design. If we are to envision and design critical alternatives, how can critical approaches to technology help? What do we need to take from criticism, which concepts of criticism and how can they be applied.

In a situation where IT is increasingly part of political processes and spaces – including management, institutional and organizational software, communication software, learning, physical spaces, smart cities, innovation culture and the arts – and where IT is even an integrated part of envisioning the future like we see in relation to the wide spread of concepts such as 'open', 'sharing' and 'networked', we need new theories to understand our role as HCI professionals and designers. The benefits of this workshop aims to be a discussion of how critical theory can contribute to envisioning and making critical alternatives. Including a clarification of when and how to apply critical theory.

STRUCTURE OF THE DAY

The workshop will start with short presentations of position papers that will be grouped according to theoretical underpinnings. After this 3 design cases will be presented and we will conduct group discussions of how, when and why to apply criticism to these cases. The workshop will be concluded by producing a common document in the form of a manifesto, a heuristics or posters on why, how and when to include criticism within design.

REFERENCES

1. Benjamin, Walter, *Gesammelte Schriften*. Edited by R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser. Werkausgabe. ed. 12 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980),

Copyright© 2015 is held by the author(s). Publication rights licensed to Aarhus University and ACM

5th Decennial Aarhus Conference on Critical Alternatives
August 17 – 21, 2015, Aarhus Denmark

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7146/aahcc.v1i1.21621>

2. Dewey, John, *Art as experience*. (New York: Perigee, 2005),
3. Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of judgment*. (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover ; Newton Abbot : David & Charles, 2005).