

Editorial: Design Innovation and Philosophy of Technology, the Practical Turn

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Introduction

Human-technology relations are one of the key issues in design innovation and the shaping of our future. Also in the Philosophy of Technology human-technology relations are a central theme. New insights in the complex interplay between humans and technology can be gained from collaboration between Design and Philosophy of Technology, especially in the current of the so-called ‘empirical turn’ where the focus is on individual technologies and real-world contexts (Achterhuis, 2001; Verbeek, 2005). Design Innovation can use the frameworks of philosophers to theorize the findings from practice or to make sense of past developments. And designing actual things provides a powerful laboratory to test philosophical frameworks in practice. Through the collaboration between design innovation and philosophy these conceptual frameworks can become ‘practical’. Therefore, in analogy with the empirical turn in philosophy of technology before, the further step of the present collaboration with design is termed a ‘practical turn’ (Eggink & Dorrestijn, 2018a).

Outlook

Philosophy of Technology has a substantial track record in thinking about the impacts of technology and innovations on our daily lives and social behaviours (Brey, 2012; Dorrestijn, 2012; Verbeek, 2014). Combining this conceptual toolkit with design innovation, with its capability of actually changing things, promises a powerful approach to developing critical future-making practices. This approach focuses on anticipating possibilities and consequences of innovations. As such, it is related to responsible innovation, social design and critical design, but also different in being more reflexive and explorative (Eggink & Dorrestijn, 2018b).

Using philosophy of technology frameworks to make sense of the world, we can also come to new insights and perspectives on the application of technology in innovations (Raub et al., 2018). In this sense it can also be a valuable addition to the Design Driven Innovation approach by Verganti (2009), where radical innovation is realized by changing the meaning of things (Eggink & Rompay, 2015). Especially when this approach is being criticized in the sense that “[t]here seems to be a need for more practice-based studies that connect Verganti’s (2009) theoretical DDI framework [...] with design practice.” (Kristiansen & Gausdal, 2018, p. 2).

Papers

Under the notion of a practical turn in the philosophy of technology this track brings together papers in which either insights from philosophy of technology become concretely applied in design innovations; or the other way around, the practice of design and innovation becomes a way of philosophical enquiry into technology. These papers reflect such a practical turn in the philosophy of technology in a broad variety, from practical design cases to a theoretical inquiry into the nature of contemporary design problems.



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The first paper *Changing Things: Innovation through Design Philosophy* by Johan Redström and Heather Wiltse is the most theoretical. Redström and Wiltse make a case for using a Philosophy of Technology approach to develop design theory. As design is of course always future oriented, design theory is also always about change. However, in this paper the authors convincingly show how change is no longer a matter of time and place but rather has become a central characteristic of the products itself. We are therefore in need of new concepts to understand these changing products, for which Redström and Wiltse propose some insightful examples.

The second paper *Towards a Tangible Philosophy through Design, Exploring the question of being-in-the-world in the digital age* by Jonne van Belle, Jelle van Dijk and Wouter Eggink is more towards the practical side, containing a design case about the use of mobile phones in everyday life. In fact, van Belle et al. are broadening the concept of the practical turn by adding the term *Philosophy through Design*. In analogy with the concept of Research through Design (Findeli, 2010; Frayling, 1993), they are exploring a Philosophical concept inspired by the work of Tim Ingold through the design of concrete artefacts.

The paper *Values that Matter: Mediation theory and Design for Values* by Merlijn Smits, Bas Bredie, Harry van Goor and Peter-Paul Verbeek is the most practical of this track. In this work the authors show how specific Philosophy of Technology theory – in this case mediation theory by Verbeek (2015) – can inform design practice and design methodology alongside a case for value sensitive design.

In the last paper *From Hype to Practice: Revealing the Effects of AI in Service Design* Titta Jylkäs, Andrea Augsten and Satu Miettinen literally take a step back and zoom out again when they philosophise about the consequences of new technology – in this case the development of Artificial Intelligence – on the lives of people in general and service designers in particular. Therefore, this contribution nicely suits as a conclusion to this track, not by elaborating yet another philosophical design tool, but by showing “reflection in design” in the context of design research.

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