Design for Debate may be very interesting; but how do we know if it’s any good?

- What is the efficiency of thought-provoking design?
- Can this experimental work escape the ‘ghetto’ [of the art college] and connect with a broader audience?
- So how might a general audience engage with critical design?

- How should we judge one project from another?
- Is it relevant to speak of common standards when we are invited to draw on personal experience?
- Is it ultimately a matter of individual taste?
- Is it subject specific?
- How is it different from installation art?
- Is there a danger that conceptual design may become a sophisticated, self indulgent and self-referential ‘entertainment’?

- What is the role of these projects?
- Should the design only evoke debate, or also generate further steps?

one of the possible answers:
“Scenarios and prototypes prepare us for the future.”


“Steeped in the human condition, ideally a few steps ahead of it, it follows the course of events and at critical junctures is compelled to take the lead and show the world a different way forward.”

interview with Paola Antonelli, Senior Curator, Department of Architecture in MoMa in Domus 949, July/August 2011
Design fiction

A method of critical design that uses fictional and narrative scenarios to envision, explain and raise questions about possible futures for design and the society.

The deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change.
“For a while now, we’ve both been very interested in the space between reality and the impossible, a space of dreams, hopes, and fears. Usually this space is occupied by future forecasts (commercial world), design scenarios (corporate world) and utopias and dystopias (literary and cinematic worlds).

It’s an important space, a place where the future can be debated and discussed before it happens, so that, at least in theory, the most desirable futures can be aimed for and the least desirable avoided.

There are no solutions here, or even answers, just lots of questions, thoughts, ideas and possibilities, all expressed through the language of design. They probe our beliefs and values, challenge our assumptions and encourage us to imagine how what we call ‘reality’ could be different. They help us see that the way things are now is just one possibility, and not necessarily the best one.

As the dreams that fed the 20th century imagination begin to fade, we need to learn how to dream new dreams.”

Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, curators, WHAT IF...
WHAT IF...
WE COULD FARM MEDICAL PRODUCTS ON OUR BODIES?
WHAT IF...
WE COULD SAMPLE ANIMAL DNA AND CREATE NEW UNIMAGINED HYBRIDS?
WHAT IF...
OUR EMOTIONS COULD BE READ
BY MACHINES?
What if...Our emotions were read by machines?..
Belief Systems: Bernhard Hopfengärtner, 2009

Facial micro-expressions last less than a second and are almost impossible to control. They are hard-wired to the emotional activity in the brain and can be easily captured using specially developed technological devices. Free will is in question as science exposes decision-making as an emotional process rather than a rational one. This ability to read emotions technologically could result in a society obsessed with emotional reactions. Emotions, convictions and beliefs, which usually remain hidden, now become a public matter. ‘Belief Systems’ is a video scenario about a society that responds to the challenges of modern neuroscience by embracing these technological possibilities to read, evaluate and alter people’s behaviours and emotions.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELFuH9jSLP8
What if...we could evaluate the genetic potential of lovers?

Evidence Dolls: Dunne and Raby, 2005

'Evidence Dolls' consists of one hundred plastic dolls used to provoke discussion among a group of young single women about the impact of genetic technology on their lifestyle. How will dating change when DNA analysis can reveal the presence of undesirable genes? The evidence dolls come in three versions based on penis size (small, medium and large). A black indelible marker is provided to note down any characteristics on the doll's body. Hair, toenail clippings, saliva and sperm can be stored in the penis drawer.
What if products could protect themselves from threats in their environment the way animals do in nature?

Artificial Defence Mechanisms: Bernhard Hopfengärtner, 2009

Would we take better care of them? Would they last longer? Would we feel sorry for them?

https://vimeo.com/12768333
What if...clouds were geo-engineered to snow ice cream?
The Cloud Project: Zoe Papadopoulou and Cathrine Kramer, 2009

Developments in nanotechnology and planetary-scale engineering point to new possibilities for us to manipulate the global environment according to our needs. These advances, combined with a dream to make clouds snow ice cream, inspired a series of experiments that look at ways to alter the composition of clouds to make new and delicious sensory experiences. Using ice cream as a catalyst for dialogue, the project's focus is to welcome people into a 'nano' ice cream van and allow new audiences to experience and imagine emerging scientific developments and their consequences.
These projects have been also described as ‘props for non-existent films’

Diegetic Prototypes and the Role of Popular Films in Generating Real-world Technological Development
2001 Space Odyssey (1968)
idea of a tablet
Dr. Martin Cooper, inventor of the first handheld mobile phone, credits the communicator as being his inspiration for the technology. Although the first "brick" mobile phones were much larger, modern flip phones like Motorola’s StarTAC strongly resemble the original series communicator.
Back to the future (1985)
Hoverboard
Such experiences have long had a home in the cinema, the theatre, on the magic stage and in the amusement park.

In other words, places where a temporary escape from the ‘iron cage’ of rationality has been permissible in the name of fantasy and entertainment (During 2002).
The value of science fiction has been also recognised in the rise of a new method for designing technology, called design fiction. If science fiction stimulates the imagination about extraordinary views of the future, design fiction explores the futures that ordinary people would prefer. Design fictions – like short sci-fi films, prototypes and graphic novels – are provocative and engage people, encouraging them to envision, explain and raise questions about direction of future technology and society.

Emmanuel Tsekleves “Science fiction as fact: how desires drive discoveries”, Guardian, 2010
Other examples

https://www.media.mit.edu/research/groups/design-fiction

Design Fiction

Sparking imagination and discussion about the social, cultural, and ethical implications of new technologies through design and storytelling.

The Design Fiction group explores how to spark imagination and discussion about the social, cultural, and ethical implications of new technologies through design and storytelling. The group also explores alternative ways to encourage debate using sociocultural media and popular culture.

Research Projects

Impossible Baby
Ali Hargreaves, Spathikol and Asako Mekura

Delivery a baby from same-sex parents is not a sci-fi dream anymore: recent developments in genetics and other new research fields make this dream much closer to reality. In creating a baby, from same-sex parents the