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Cart 360

Critical Reflection 3

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Our Symbiotic Life: An Exploration of Interspecies Relations is a text detailing possible futures using design fiction methods to predict how humanity's relationship to plants and flora may develop over the next decades. The researchers, designers and artists hypothesize four possible types of realities, *Harmony*, *Invasion*, *On Demand* and *Bottle Garden*. Those working on the experiment then create models, imagery and prototypes of how these realities would come to exist and how people would adapt to them.

Overall, these studies provide multiple perspectives of the world might evolve with the climate crisis. However, many of the perspectives are fictional (as described in the title of the process) and don't relate to any serious real world statistics. Furthermore, there are other techniques that researchers use to determine possible futures, primarily using mathematics to determine results and probabilities surrounding certain events. In this text, I wish to argue that combining design fiction with predictive mathematics can enhance these prototypes scenarios and allow creators to come up with solutions that are extravagant yet accurate at the same time.

To begin, what theories can we use to determine future scenarios? Let's break down the one mentioned in *Our Symbiotic Life:* design fiction. Author Bruce Sterling defines design fiction as "the deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change"(*Medium*). In a sense, there are no limits to design fiction because it allows the designer to explore possibilities that they may never experience or have never experienced. On the other hand, one of the most common uses of mathematics and data collection is determining common outputs

and predicting patterns. One common mathematical prediction theory is Benford's law, which (put very simply) states that numbers starting with 1 are more common to appear than number starting with 2-9 (*YouTube*). There is also the notion that once an event has occurred, like a burglary or an earthquake, it is much more likely to happen again. Furthermore, we can even predict accurate outcomes and patterns in chaotic environments like the weather thanks to Chaos theory. Theories like the butterfly effect have demonstrated that the slightest change in data and stimuli can create drastically different effects despite still being able to track the data involved (*The Conversation*). Overall, while mathematics cannot necessarily provide exact predictions for the future, many of these predictive calculations output simple and informative results we can refer to.

To continue, one must ask what is the benefit of combining a purely imaginative theoretic model to a logical theoretic model. Frankly, there is no reason why designers shouldn't take into consideration factual and statistical data when coming up with new products and spaces for future generations. Similarly, there is no reason for designers to limit their imagination when theorizing new possibilities for the future of the world. It often feels as though a designer must choose one side in order to come up with an idea that will serve those later in life. However, determined mathematics like statistics can serve as a guideline for these wonderful thought experiments. I believe that it is possible to suspend disbelief while still being rooted in real events and facts. Therefore, many great things can come from combining logical and imaginative theories.

In conclusion, I believe that designers will benefit from combining design fiction with predictive mathematics. As Marshal McLuhan once said: "Art is anything you can get away with", and you can get away with a lot even with a few guiding principles.

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