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Economic Design Fictions: Finding the Human Scale

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In this chapter, design is envisaged beyond its role of packaging innovation to become a discursive tool fostering debates on inventing new economics by considering an experiment led by the studio Design Friction.[1] I first build on the notion of design fictions, meaning fictitious artefacts challenging prejudiced beliefs, to understand, from a theoretical standpoint, what economics could benefit from this specific posture, especially when bringing a human scale to these complex future systems. Having described these inputs, I then develop a proposition of a blueprint to construct Economic Design Fiction. This framework is meant to assist a co-creation process between stakeholders, whether or not economists, and designers in order to produce economic design fictions as materialisations of speculative economic systems intended to be discussed. With this blueprint in mind, a case study is reviewed involving actual economic-oriented design fictions built in order to test and evaluate the potential of such approach when questioning the purpose of new economic paradigms. In concluding, we look at the limits of Economic Design Fiction, extrapolating on

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[1] Design Friction is a studio based in France producing critical and speculative scenarios to explore sociotechnological changes.

further iterations and improvements that could be brought to this undertaking.[2]

Designing Fictions and Frictions

Design, in all its forms, has always been tightly interwoven with economics. Today, even if it is driven by the pressing needs of productivism, consumerism and innovation, more and more designers are orienting their practice to engage the political. Design Fiction is one of these attempts to speculate on preferable perspectives, tweaking cultural, social and, more especially, economic beliefs.

Design Fiction is not a widespread posture among designers. Drawing from reflexive research questioning the design practice, Design Fiction relies on a problem-finding approach rather than a problem-solving one. The latter has established its dogma in the entrepreneurial culture, and design thinking has been a major asset in the race to 'make the world a better place'. It comes with recurrent injunctions to produce changes and even break things, as stated by the emblematic Silicon Valley gurus. Problem-finding, on the contrary, is all about understanding complex situations before attempting to fix anything that might even not be broken in the first place. It calls for intricate questions on the interinfluencing tensions between technologies, social issues and political ideologies. By switching from problem-solving to problem-finding, design fictions are no longer addressing a facet of a problem but are investigating the very structural issues of a situation.

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[2] I would like to warmly thank my friend and colleague Estelle Hary for her thoughtful feedback and accurate criticism of this chapter.

Across their projects, designers step back and start to consider the bigger picture: are we solving the right problem? Or are we accelerating or crystallising existing negative externalities? To achieve this ambitious journey, Design Fiction is frequently inspired by input from different fields of expertise, such as ethnography, engineering and economics.

The problem-finding posture of Design Fiction looks at our near futures, focusing on emerging issues and the evolution of current status quos. The whole point of this initiative is not to predict tomorrow, but to be able to anticipate systemic challenges and stakes.

Extrapolating on weak signals, Design Fiction agitates social imaginaries as well as the realms of possible utopias and dystopias inhabiting these imaginaries. It acts as 'compasses rather than maps,'[3] to open and foster discussions related to changes. In this sense, Design Fiction tells of new trajectories and alternative possibilities.

At this point, Design Fiction shares similar ground with strategic foresight, futures research and even science fiction. It is, in fact, a complementary approach, as design takes benefits from its aptitude to translate questions into concrete scenarios and products. By the use of diegetic prototypes aiming at suspending disbelief towards changes,'[4] design fictions are objects materialising worlds and not just stories. They work as 'provotypes', meant to be provocative prototypes, semi-functional products embedding critics and speculative values to challenge recurrent status quos. In order to make speculations

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[3] A. Dunne and F. Raby (2013) *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

[4] B. Sterling (2013) *Patently Untrue: Fleshy Defibrillators and Synchronised Baseball are Changing the Future*, Wired UK, 11 October.

experiential and to overcome the traditional pitfalls of fiction, Design Fiction shows serious arguments as seen previously. Designers are crafting compelling and believable scenarios. In their speculative productions, they keep in mind their aspirations for technical feasibility, but also the criterion of desirability and viability.

The purpose of Design Fiction is to resort to thought-provoking scenarios and prototypes that do not focus on implementation but, rather, on discussing 'What if?' scenarios with stakeholders. The following example demonstrates an actual case when designers have worked with multidisciplinary teams in devising on socio-technological futures, with an emphasis on economic renewal.

ProtoPolicy'[5] is a diptych of design fictions looking at the future of ageing in place. This experiment, carried out by the studio Design Friction and several British universities, raised the questions of assistive and invasive technologies. Two provotypes were designed and confronted with the thoughts of public policy-makers and civil servants: Soulaje, a self-administered euthanasia wearable; and the Smart Home Therapist, a counsellor trained in reconciling elderly people with their connected domestic appliances. Through its scenarios, ProtoPolicy especially addressed the economic stakes behind ageing in place with speculations on elderly employment, the impact of the silver economy and the struggles of the healthcare system.

As highlighted by this example, design fictions, through representing abstract ideas and challenging the status quo, are revealed to be an unexpected help when inventing the economy of tomorrow.

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[5] ProtoPolicy (2015) *Using Design Fiction to Negotiate Political Questions*. Lancaster University: Imagination Lancaster.

Why Design Fiction Matters for Economics

Could design fictions have the capacity to make concrete and experiential the implications of possible larger paradigms shifts in the economy? When rethinking the economy, there is, more than ever, an urgency to consider the human scale. Economics is part of our daily life, but it is regarded by many as an abstract concept. The human scale is about making new economic perspectives tangible, relatable and ready to be debated beyond a community of experts. To do so, Design Fiction suggests three levers with which to bring in the human scale when reinventing the economy: everydayness, ambiguity and discussion.

Everydayness

Designers embed their visions for alternative futures in mundane artefacts challenging our imagination. In a similarity with the prevailing practice of industrial design, practitioners focus on everydayness as the scale of intervention. Future objects allow us to materialise speculations, but they begin to be fully relatable when they are connected to the daily life of stakeholders, notably when it comes to dealing with perplexing notions. Having this concept of everydayness in mind, Design Fiction contributes by defining and then designing for the 'new normal,'[6] to use the terminology of Anab Jain, from the design studio Superflux.

Ambiguity

Envisaging alternative perspectives, Design Fiction is qualified in tackling controversial themes, to act as a provocation,

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[6] A. Jain (2013) *Design for the New Normal.* Superflux.

developing rhetoric on new narratives for production and consumption. Designing speculation is, in itself, a thought-out operation, demystifying the current status quo and revealing hegemonies occurring daily in our societies. This critical posture is mandatory to avoid reproducing 'flat-pack futures', a term coined by Scott Smith from Changeist,[7] a studio that fuses strategic design and foresight. Fuelled with ambiguity, the process of Design Fiction looks for frictions: what has been taken for granted by economic stakeholders, but is not for a deliberately ignored part of the population. Divergent scenarios are essential in fostering the pluralism of views and voices when economic systems are struggling to overcome their own neoliberal, climate-sceptical or social-xenophobic mythologies.[8]

One way to experiment with the principle of ambiguity in economic design fictions is by mixing influences and trends that seem to have no direct connections. Scenarios then take unexpected paths. With uncanny products or services, design fictions are an invitation to embrace the weirdness and the strangeness that are part of the new normal. In this way, design fictions cover the blind spots of futurescaping and the grey areas of systemic dependencies.

Discussion

Design fictions aim at triggering discussions beyond the communities of experts. By asking us to think about our expectations for the future, it actually becomes a catalyst to reflect on our considerations for the present.

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[7] S. Smith (2013) *Beware of the Flat-pack Futures*. Media Future Week.

[8] E. Laurent (2016) Nos Mythologies Economiques.

Using materialised fictions as a starting point for conversation is expected to help to uncover fears, hopes and concerns from non-specialists about systemic shifts. It becomes even more relevant when confronted by a diversity of audiences and cultures. It encourages both spontaneous reactions and structured thoughts on what could be framed as preferable perspectives. How can we go there? How can we head to this preferable direction? Is it really a preferable situation? To whom? Figure 12.1 emphasises this idea of continuous and reciprocal influences between the 'real' world and the speculated perspectives.
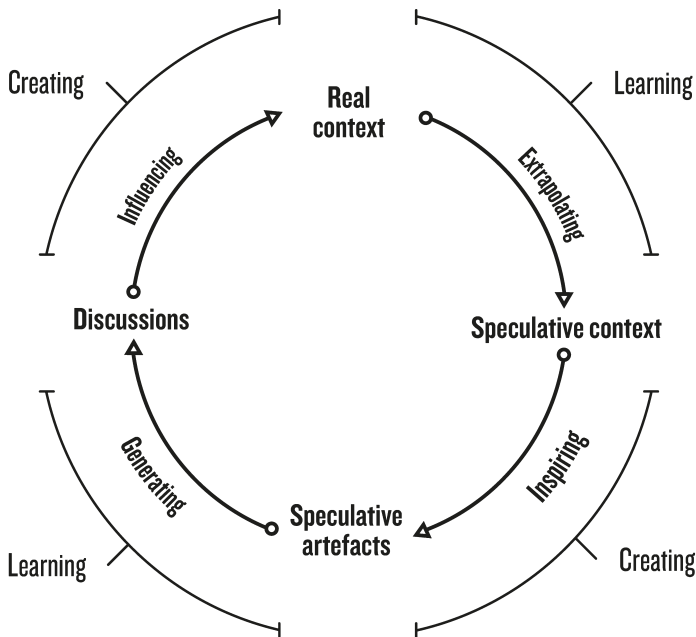
Figure 12.1 Design fictions set the basis for debates that aim, in turn, to influence our current models

It is a safe bet that discussing our assumptions on how techno-economic changes could affect our everyday life and the broader perspectives of our society will confront our beliefs in the new economy. Design Fiction as a provocative discipline becomes an asset in the decision-making process by showing us uncharted territories and unheard-of reactions.

Appealing for necessary turbulence, these three particular levers from Design Fiction facilitate the objections addressed to monocultures and self-fulfilling prophecies by extending the reinvention of economics to inputs from third parties. Design Fiction seems to be timely in its suitability for the exploration of scenarios associated with heterodox microeconomics. The everydayness lever indeed looks at the daily economic mechanisms in our lives while the ambiguity lever pushes for ideas for exploring ways that definitely do not belong to the field of mainstream economic paradigms. As Design Fiction has mainly been involved in reflecting on issues related to new technologies, however, there is a need to formulate guidelines to orient the process in engaging economic perspectives – thus producing what could be named Economic Design Fiction.

A Blueprint for Economic Design Fictions

Design Fiction is not just a matter of being a designer. For a few years now design thinking has intensively democratised design tools and methods for the entrepreneurial sphere, and even beyond. Design Fiction appears to be a tool for mediation in collaborative world-building experiences and a needed blueprint for building together. The blueprint for Economic Design Fiction aims to facilitate the translation of speculated new economic models into concrete objects for demonstrations and discussions. It consists of two canvases, one to set

the speculative context and the other to imagine a product that narrates this alternative universe.

Looking at the Extremes: Scarcity and Post-Scarcity Contexts

A good story needs a good setting. For economic design fictions, a good setting challenges our relation to the law of supply and demand and its possible evolution.

The blueprint offers to set the design fictions in a two-fold speculative context: scarcity, with the disappearance of a specific element; and post-scarcity, a situation of abundance. To conceptualise those distant horizons, the starting point is the question of resources, be they natural or artificial, and the related mundane products made of them. As with the considerations for everydayness in Design Fiction, they will act as bridges to think about system changes.

Even if scarcity and post-scarcity might seem unlikely to happen soon, they are useful entry points for pondering our current systems. By playing with exaggerations, these extremes serve as a stimulating and effective basis for creative thought experiments. Radical speculations prevent us from sticking to timorous, pragmatic and short-term visions, which are in the way of real economic ingenuity. More interestingly, they move us to look at the robustness of the components of our economic models and to consider how they behave when stressed in unconsidered situations. How are we going to produce, to consume, to distribute and to sustain in such conditions of discontinuity?

Oscillating between scarcity and post-scarcity as a framework for thoughts is about alternating alternatives, looking at each edge of the spectrum of speculation; thinking how we are at ease with mirroring our fears and hopes for economics,

be they utopian or dystopian projections. In this way, the coupling of scarcity and post-scarcity appears to be salutary, forcing us to envisage far-out changes and driving us away from the temptation of replicating faded socio-economic configurations.

The Speculative Context Canvas

The speculative context canvas sets the overall environment, from an economic perspective, for designing new models (see Figure 12.2). It is a matrix modelling the guidelines needed to imagine how key economic components such as production, distribution and consumption might evolve in a situation of scarcity or post-scarcity. To draw the outlines of this newly impacted society, the process starts with choosing a resource
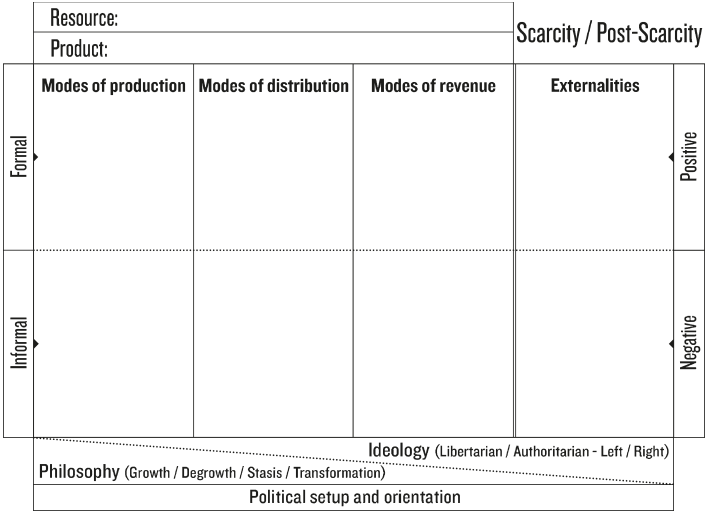
Figure 12.2   The speculative context canvas sets the economic paradigms of the speculated world

and a related mundane product. The product then becomes a manifesto of alternative economic paradigms implied by the radical shift of abundance or shortage. World-building happens through the lens of the product life cycle.

The speculative context canvas adopts the following structure.

Resources and Products

This is the starting point of a speculative economic system. It requires defining a natural or artificial resource, renewable or not, as well as a mundane product based or using this resource.

Political Set-Up and Orientation

This is the bedrock of the speculative context. It sets the political background that will influence the economic set-up in which the scarcity or post-scarcity product is going to evolve. It crosses ideological properties, combining the duality of left-wing/right-wing politics with the nuance of authoritarianism or libertarianism. The philosophical orientation completes the ideological system by adding a shared ideal to reach. In addition to the archetypical ambition for continuous growth and responsible degrowth, the speculative world can also opt for stasis, denying any opportunity for expansion and reduction, or transformation, converting its founding principles in unforeseen models.

Modes of Production, Distribution and Revenue

These three modes describe the backstage of the product life cycle and are, at the same time, another demonstration of the existence and influences of new economic paradigms in a scarcity or post-scarcity scenario. They cover all the steps of the history of the selected product, from being assembled to being distributed and exchanged for values.

Each mode is articulated around formal practices (such as subcontracting, recycling or online shopping) and informal ones (think about the black market, corruption, hacking or tweaking).

Externalities

This last part of the matrix is dedicated to extrapolating how externalities – positive or negative – related to the product are going to be acknowledged, managed or even ignored. Externalities typically include post-consumption, post-production and post-distribution impacts.

The scenery having been set, it is time to design the main prop articulating the whole fiction.

The Speculative Product Canvas

If the speculative context canvas is about establishing the environment for the design fiction, the product canvas is the one laying out the provotype to be discussed. The chosen mundane product needs to be reformulated according to the speculative context, its features, uses and consumers, then changing. These new characteristics of the product are like many highlights of the causes and consequences of new axioms actually remodelling the supply and demand concept. To fulfil their promise of being thought-provoking, however, the prototypes have to work in concert. They follow the principle of a diptych: for each resource, there are two extrapolated outputs, two products, each one embedding the vision of a scarcity or a post-scarcity economic system. By representing both the extremes, the diptych offers points of comparison for exploring in-between scenarios.

The speculative context canvas integrates three axes:

- features of the product (meaning: what it does);
- users or consumers (meaning: who uses it);
- uses of the product (meaning: what it is used for). This last part might sound similar to the features of the product, but it invites us to think about forbidden or unplanned uses.

All three items of the canvas suggest envisaging which elements of the product appear, remain unchanged or disappear in the speculative context when compared to our current object of reference (see Figure 12.3).

This being said, the matrix is just the very basis required to create speculative products personifying a different economic model. It still has to go through a classic design process, going

Resource:		Product:		
	Appearing/increasing	**Unchanged**	**Disappearing/decreasing**
Product features			
Users/customers			
Product uses			

Figure 12.3 The speculative product canvas embodies the values and beliefs of the fictitious context in a real-fictional product

back and forth between ideation and iteration phases to finally deliver a real-fictional artefact. A team of designers, engineers and makers could easily build real and complex prototypes, although other diegetic formats are a matter of interest. Pieces such as fictional newspaper articles, user manuals and promotional flyers are some 'easy-and-cheap-to-prototype' options to stage the design fictions or extend the message of actual prototypes.

Neither of the matrices of the blueprint is intended to be used as a strict framework but, rather, to operate as a creative opener to structure inputs and to test the coherence of economics-oriented design fictions.

Case Study: Data, in Scarcity and Post-Scarcity Worlds

Our studio, Design Friction, experimented with this Economic Design Fiction blueprint to create two provocative scenarios intending to collect feedback on this discursive approach. While speculating on situations of scarcity and post-scarcity in data-driven economies, we shared these design fictions with economists as well as with non-experts to evaluate the extent to which such prototypes are able to foster imaginative thinking on the implications of other possible economic systems.

What If Data Were the Key Resource of the Economy?

This is the question that our speculation starts with. The digital economy has proved to be one of the most trending topics among industries and entrepreneurs in recent years, but also a subject carrying persistent myths, despite its relative youth. Almost every sector is now impacted directly or indirectly by what has been termed 'digitalisation'. Markets tend to

rely more and more on data-driven orientations. Data are often mistakenly referred to as 'the new oil', regardless of the peculiar limits of the metaphor. It echoes the beliefs and trust placed in algorithms and connected technologies.

Free from the past fears of the planned economy, digitalisation has brought us a calculated economy. The promise of decentralised economies and systems is, for the moment, dominated by the concentrated and private ownership of a few operators, however. Indeed, the digital economy is tarnished by controversies about new gigantic monopolies, the lack of redistribution of values and a rapid pace of growth that is not thought likely to be handed down to future generations. Economic design fictions are then appropriate means for a debate about our expectations for an economy in which we are both the consumers and the products. Interestingly, 'big data' and its derivative metrics are also enforcing our insatiable faith in economic prediction, making it a proper choice when it comes to speculating on economic futures.

Our two design fictions will take data as a resource and the smartphone as a related product to explore new socio-economic models being developed in societies varying from abounding with data to having banned them.

The Data Sniffer, a Product for Data Scarcity

In this speculative society, collecting and using personal data for commercial services had been banned after a massive leak of everybody's private data. Mass protests ensued and governments united in deciding to declare illegal every data-driven business. Data should neither be processed, shared nor stocked by third-party entities for commercial purposes. Economic models based on big data mining have collapsed. On the other

hand, socio-economic paradigms that have evolved since the economy of attention have been radically redefined, without any digital application distracting us any more. As a consequence, each former data-based product had been redesigned so as to not share data any more.

The data sniffer marks the great comeback of the mobile phone antenna. As its name gives it away, the reactive antenna looks for electromagnetic signals to point towards the source of data, be it a hidden data centre or an undeclared sensor. As a kind of divining rod, the data-sniffing antenna helps in avoiding specific places linked to the use of personal data. It points out threats to the users, but the device also reports the fraudulent collection or stocking of data to concerned authorities. Concretely, the antenna bends to highlight the direction in which the data hotspot is situated. Basically, the closer you get to the source of data, the longer the antenna grows to refine the location of possible data spots (see Figure 12.4).
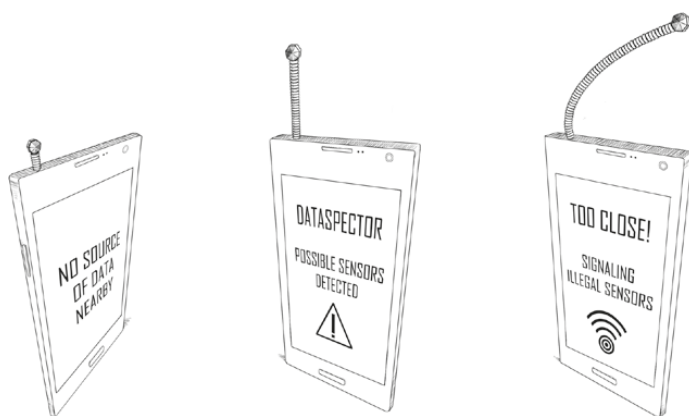
Figure 12.4 In an economic system suffering from data scarcity, consumers could be protected by a smart antenna detecting traces left by banned data-related activities (illustration: Emmanuelle Roulph)

In this design fiction, the data sniffer had been stated as a mandatory feature that smartphone constructors have to include in their products, on the basis of legal requirements. The speculative product was introduced through a fictional user manual explaining how it should be operated.

When presented to both economists and online service users, the comments first underlined a possible 'slowification' of the world, with real-time data use no longer permitted. The participants highlighted that the disappearance of data-driven systems would accelerate the growth of local markets and insular economic communities. The data scarcity environment was also a convenient occasion for a new economy. In addition, new jobs were suggested to track and report any irregular use of data. New civic incentives would be set up to deal with data as a threat to civil liberties. To ensure this guarantee, human operators would replace algorithms, processing data 'by hand' to avoid the possibility of the latter being leaked or misused.

Production settings have also been discussed in connection with the end of digital black boxes. For the remaining attempt to mine and refine data, every procedure would have to be transparent and publicly readable, implying the end of any technological monopoly. In this set-up, all individuals would become their own data heaven and, under very strict regulation, be able to monetise their private data for certified companies or research labs. Interestingly, this context of data scarcity was also the opportunity to point out the likelihood of an emerging economy of fear: the widespread paranoia would have triggered new businesses and regulations tailored to satisfy the desires for privacy.

Imagination had its own limits, however. Through the discussions, it could clearly be observed that there was a temptation to reproduce what was the pre-internet economy,

without building on the identified possibilities of networked intelligence and a dematerialisation of knowledge.

The Infobesity Case, a Product for Post-Data Scarcity

This design fiction speculates as to what the consequences might be of the unstoppable rise of data production. Data-driven economies are here regarded as being at saturation point, with too many data having been generated and having to be processed. It has become costly to develop algorithmic services and dedicated places, such as data centres, to manage these massive flows of data. In this context, some people have become data addicts, with all their personal and social activities or rituals depending on data-driven solutions. As a matter of fact, a lot of data coming from these digital junkies are considered meaningless, or even redundant, for big data-driven systems. Information overload then shares a lot of similarity with the problem of obesity, and has, naturally, been termed 'infobesity'. As a consequence, several start-ups launch products to help in reducing the production and use of data-driven services by data addicts.

As one of those many products launched to thrive in a world loaded with data, the 'infobesity case' is a shell that promises to reduce your production and use of digital content. Targeting data addicts in the first place, the case provides an incentive for a data diet. The idea is quite simple: the more you use and produce data, the fatter the case gets. The chubbiness of the infobesity case is an indication of the status of your production and use of data. At some point, the shell is intended to become so big that it is actually hard to carry the smartphone with you. Using it for basic operations such as chatting or browsing on social networks is also way more difficult, de facto reducing the use of data (see Figure 12.5).

Stage 1
Normality

Stage 2
Vigilance

Stage 3
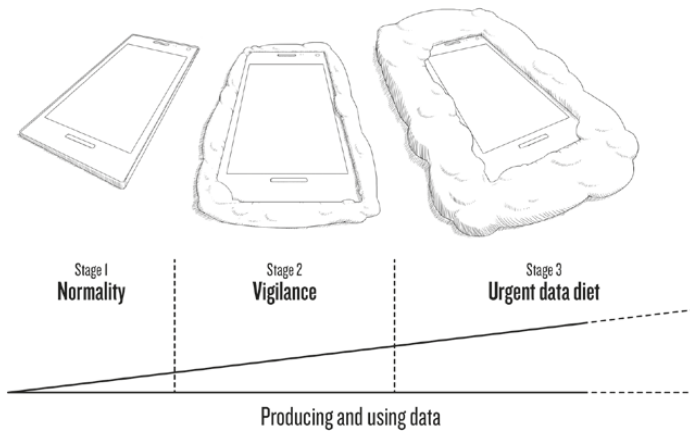**Urgent data diet**

Producing and using data

Figure 12.5 To help discuss the economic implications of data post-scarcity, this design fiction introduces the infobesity case, a smartphone case with the unique feature of getting fatter the more data are used (illustration: Emmanuelle Roulph)

The product also bets on public shaming having the effect of pushing people to act upon their data-related activities. Nobody wants to carry a fat smartphone, highlighting that they are a certain cost to society, as they are not responsible enough to manage their relation to data. As for the actual obesity, this statement is partial and incorrect, as the overproduction or overconsumption might have many causes other than the sole uncontrolled will of the person – enforcing the provocative aspect of the fiction. The social pressure is here applied as a strategy to modify individual behaviour for a more mature smartphone use.

As part of the background of the product, the infobesity case is a segment of a range of untaxed assistance in regulating the quantity and quality of data produced and used. The provotype was presented with a promotional flyer from a 'data-ssistance' start-up developing the infobesity case.

What have we learned from the discussions prompted by this speculative product?

On a macro level, having a lot of data seems to implicate a pervasive automation of the economy and the ability to predict everything. Eventually, such a situation could lead to a continuous time, or a kind of atemporality, in which every trend or shift is anticipated and, in the end, doesn't happen.

In a data-driven economy propelled by abundance, the supply/demand principle, as we know it, also undergoes profound changes. Participants introduced to the infobesity case design fiction called attention to a possible devaluation of the mass of mundane data in favour of the value of 'rare data elements'. Highly qualitative data could be a complementary currency, as with the concept of 'dataxation'. With dataxation, citizens could pay their taxes with their qualitative data in order to help governments automating as well as anticipating and adjusting their policies. Building on this idea, should we be remunerated for the data we produce? Some of the reactions advocated that the market should adopt different levels of regulation and remuneration by differentiating human-made data from machine-made data.

A whole range of new mini-jobs would be specially created to support the data abundance: data janitors cleaning data, data brokers fixing values, data therapists specialised in digital-related diseases... On a more light-hearted note, it has been recommended that everyone should develop 'green habits, but for data', to aid the better management of the data profusion.

As the insights from the data sniffer and infobesity case suggest it, economic design fictions have serious potential to enhance the ways we engage with each other to discuss

and organise changes. Yet it is necessary to take the quality of the context and the deliberate framing of conversations into account. Considering the speculative horizon is especially relevant to contextualise immersions: are we setting the design fictions in five, ten or fifteen years from now? Are we even setting them in the near future or, instead, in an alternative present?

Furthermore, in this case, our productions have deliberately tended to be satirical and absurdist, but a design fiction project doesn't necessarily have to have an ironic or tongue-in-cheek feel to it. It can just as well offer a neutral commentary, or even praise. In return, the tone of the fiction will obviously influence the discussion. This is an opportunity to stimulate reactions, as well as running the risk of doors closing.

Thoughts on the Limits of Economic Design Fictions

As Design Fiction shows its potential for sparking new interactions among economists, researchers, stakeholders and citizens, we still have to acknowledge the intrinsic limits of the posture.

A Slider for the Uncanny

Design fictions are consciously shaped as provocative pieces. In the process of imagining speculative products, however, it is necessary to take care to include points of parity with the current and existing contexts. Design fictions are, by nature, designed products. They have to be relatable and plausible without feeling too weird or too extreme. The undesirable consequence would then be the audience focusing on the product rather on the world it speaks of. In doing so, the

design fiction would actually sabotage its very advantage in producing the 'suspension of disbelief' necessary to prepare the ground for immersion and discussion. A way to set the right level of weirdness and provocation is by making the design fiction experiential. When organising this type of interactive scenario, the set-up allows participants to touch the products and make choices regarding their uses. To design such a scenario, it requires a coherent narrative background that can be crafted with the guidance of the speculative context canvas.

An Ecosystem of Design Fictions

Having a single speculative product might not be sufficient to spark intense debates, as people might focus on the product's features rather than the context it emphasises. Different Design Fiction experiments, such as the ProtoPolicy mentioned earlier, hint at the good practice of building an ecosystem of fictions. One would have to design several products based on the same resource and initial situation, be it scarcity or post-scarcity. Doing so will better flesh out the various aspects of the speculated society. Indeed, the pieces of fiction can interact with each other, so that many different perspectives can be called upon to cohabit and to disagree with.

Reframing Discussions

As seen before, design fictions are a support to discussions, but for economic models it is necessary to settle on a framework of exchanges in terms of questions and reactions. Design fictions are just a starting point for more comprehensive considerations. The intent of framing and orienting the discussions has, in the end, the ambition of extrapolating on the extrapolations.

Among the good practices structuring Design Fiction methods, there is the concern to document the reactions of the stakeholders and map them, highlighting convergences and divergences between arguments.

Nevertheless, it is essential not to focus purely on collecting insights that can be turned instantly into actionable knowledge and stay free from any productive imperative. Being confronted by design fictions is also a process of provocative inspiration, relying on long-term maturation.

Better to Play with Futures than to Struggle with Them

As a creative and reflective practice, Design Fiction materialises questionings and challenges status quos about our expectation for the futures of economics. It promotes interdisciplinary discussions to displace debates on imaginary, but tangible, grounds on which long-established and accepted paradigms cannot prevail. By building economic design fictions, one has to make choices by adopting different perspectives from the views experienced on a daily basis. It is not about rehearsing what could possibly happen, but, in some way, it is still close to role-playing – meaning acting by impersonating someone else for a moment and in a particular possible future. And it is well known that people learn and grow best by playing. This is also what it means to find the human scale.