



Can Design Care for people's frustrations and doubts?

Gault, A., & Sutherland, S. (2020). Can Design Care for people's frustrations and doubts? In P. Rodgers, C. Bremner, & G. Innella (Eds.), *Does Design Care...?! Head to Head Debates* (pp. 20-34). Lancaster University.

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

Published in:

Does Design Care...?! Head to Head Debates

Publication Status:

Published (in print/issue): 20/01/2020

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Document Licence:

Unspecified

General rights

The copyright and moral rights to the output are retained by the output author(s), unless otherwise stated by the document licence.

Unless otherwise stated, users are permitted to download a copy of the output for personal study or non-commercial research and are permitted to freely distribute the URL of the output. They are not permitted to alter, reproduce, distribute or make any commercial use of the output without obtaining the permission of the author(s).

If the document is licenced under Creative Commons, the rights of users of the documents can be found at <https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/cclicenses/>.

Take down policy

The Research Portal is Ulster University's institutional repository that provides access to Ulster's research outputs. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact pure-support@ulster.ac.uk

Does Design Care...?!

Head-to-Head Debates

Edited by:
Paul A. Rodgers
Giovanni Innella
Craig Bremner



Introduction

In 2017 the first Does Design Care...? workshop at Imagination Lancaster asked a series of question that were eventually addressed in both the publication of the Lancaster Care Charter (Design Issues 35:1 2019) and the DDC...? Book.

Similarly, in 2019 the second Does Design Care...? workshop in Chiba, Japan, asked more questions but this time the questions came from the participants. To participate in the Does Design Care [2]...? workshop applicants had to send a 1000 word position paper from which a number of questions emerged; questions we thought needed debate not just discussion (a bit of a beating rather than a mere shakeup). The questions are listed at the end of this introduction. It is important to make clear the questions arose from what the participants were saying. In order to familiarise themselves with the questions they were sent to all participants in advance

of the workshop. On the first morning of the workshop participants were randomly paired for what we called Head-to-Head debates. Each pair was randomly assigned one of the 25 questions to explore and contend in greater detail. They were required to record (audio, notes, images, examples) their debate and at later stage in the workshop each pair presented what they had been debating to the rest of the participants. After the workshop each pair had to transcribe, edit, and enrich with visuals, their debate, all of which has been collected into this publication.

Like the first workshop in Lancaster the Chiba workshop was a thinking, making and doing workshop that explored different ways to explore, conceptualise, provoke, contest and disrupt care, and the various outputs serve to synthesise future visions of care. Unlike the Lancaster workshop, a strong conviction coming from the participants was that design can and does empathise and therefore design can and does care. What-design-can-do is embedded in its historic belief in the design of what-might-become. But as we have written elsewhere (?remember where?), in reality design's future has to confront what-might-not-become. And what-might-not-become has to confront the uncomfortable reality that design might not be able to do what it believes it can do. Care, being invisible, is a good test for what in reality design can do. Rebecca Solnit questions empathy when she writes "There's a currently popular argument that books help us feel empathy, but if they do so they do it by helping us imagine that we are people we are not". For design to care through empathy it might just be that design, continuing to advocate what-might-become, is producing designers who imagine they are people they are not.

We have asked before whether design's attraction to care is just opportunistic. And we wonder whether the allure of empathy for design to want to transact with care because, care is becoming elitist as Yuval Harari explains,

"because it rejects the idea of a universal standard applicable to all, and seeks to give some individuals an edge over others. People want superior memories, above-average intelligence and first-class sexual abilities."
(Harari, Homo Deus, p6)

Foucault pointed out that diagnosing what is ill is always equally about enforcing what is healthy. These workshops have been diagnosing whether design cares and in this sense they have also been enforcing what-might-become of design.

Rebecca Solnit, Men Explain Lolita To Me, Literary Hub, December 17, 2015
<http://lithub.com/men-explain-lolita-to-me/>

Yuval Harari, Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow, Harvill Secker
2015, (p6)

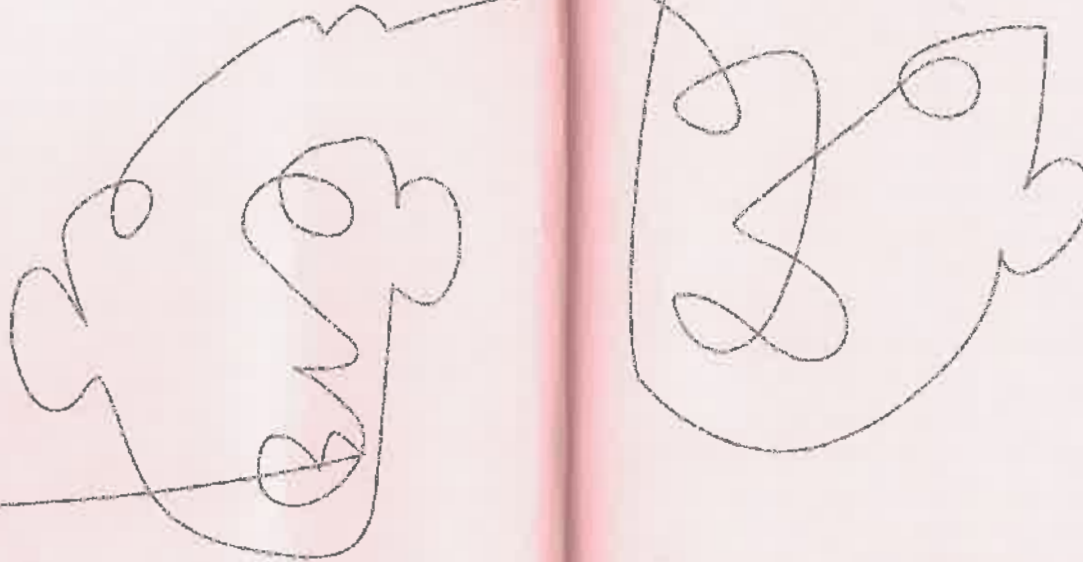
MISSING REF

For this edition of *Does Design Care...?!*, we had a few questions we wanted the participants to reflect and discuss upon. The participants were divided into pairs, each pair was handed a question to use as a conversation starter. The list of questions included the followings:

- What was Design doing before it latched on to Care?*
- Should Design Care?*
- What was Design doing before it latched on to empathy?*
- Where will all of this caring get us?*
- How might we best Design Care?*
- How might we best Bespoke Care?*
- What should we (Design) care about?*
- What should we (Design) not waste our time caring about?*
- Are there Care priorities for Design? If so, what are they and why?*
- What kind of trade would a "Care Trade" look like?*
- If Designer and User continue to have some form of relationship what future might Design and user Care for?*
- Is it possible for Design to operate in a context where we choose not to Care?*
- How might Design avoid the overdevelopment of Care?*
- Is it possible that Design & Care might sometimes produce a negative result (which means being uncaring or careless)?*
- Can Design Care for people's frustrations and doubts?*
- Is the invasion of Care by Design just another colonising fantasy?*
- Can Design empathize? If so, where does all this empathizing get us?*
- Despite the optimistic predictions for the Design of Care what does the doing of Care really do?*
- To look at the future of Care which is best - Design fiction or Science fiction?*
- What role does Design play in the gesture of Care?*
- Will Designing Care eventually medicalise Design?*
- If one were to explore the relationship between social value and the value of Care what might you get?*
- Is Design as a practice completely outside the language of Care?*
- Can Design's idealistic claims of true inclusion ever be achieved?*
- Can Design contribute to the gap between the ideal of Care and real Care?*

Can Design Care for people's frustrations and doubts?

Alison Gault & Sally Sutherland



Below is the conversation from the DDC(2) workshop. This is comprised of 4 parts

- **Definitions.** Identification of frustration and doubts. What this might mean in the context of design and care.
- **Where do frustrations and doubts manifest?** Public and private. Within design and care (research, practice, education).
- **Trust and distrust**
- **Designing with and for frustrations and doubts**

Definitions

SS: Okay, so... Dictionary definition

AG: Well, something that should be considered is the whole idea

of feminism and patriarchy. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of my hero's. A champion for feminism and she has been explaining how this is something we should all consider through her book 'we should all be feminists' and how feminism can and should be embraced by everybody with the whole idea of rights for all- I think all Designers should be feminists. It would appear in this case that frustration can be a catalyst for change and can be a way of moving from a place of discontentment or liminality to a better place. Therefore, in some ways this can be a 'positive' experience and therefore frustration is not all bad. I think we agree that dictionary definitions can really focus the mind but there can be additional elements that that might come into the mix as well.

SS: Yes .. It can also be helpful to create our own definitions.

AG: Well absolutely

SS: So we might want to do that as part of this...

AG: Yes, the definitions are only a starting point and often there is an enlargement and we might need to pare it back or add additional insights with context, So ...

(QUOTING) "Frustration.. the feeling of being upset or annoyed as a result of being unable to change or achieve something. Tears of frustration rolled down her cheeks. Synonyms are also described as exasperation, annoyance, anger, vexation, irritation, bitterness, resentment." (Lexico Dictionaries | English, 2019)

That is exactly how... If I am angry I cry because I am frustrated.

SS: Okay...

AG: Also the...

(QUOTING) "professional progress the prevention of the progress, success, or fulfilment of something... thwarting, defeat, foiling, blocking, stopping, countering, spoiling, checking, balking, circumvention,

forestalling, dashing, scotching, quashing, crushing" (Lexico Dictionaries | English, 2019)

... So I think that is interesting...

SS: Yes.. it is helpful to consider the definitions...

AG: The use of some of the selected words have impact such as thwarting... crushing. Often as designers we can feel so crushed in some environments. I know when I first moved into a more commercial industrial environment, which was still a creative environment... I felt very crushed. Because my design had to fit such a tight brief and I do think that designs and designers can feel crushed or thwarted, and that they are often overlooked, undervalued and not listened to...frustrating.

SS: Design can be frustrating and can make you doubt.... but at the same time, and back to the question I feel that design can care and with and for people's frustrations and doubts... I guess this is through mediation and communication.

AG: Absolutely...and designers should care, I use to think designers should be neutral now I think they should be more political and care about technology that discriminates, skewed algorithms and prejudiced historical stereotypes.

SS: So... it works both ways doesn't it.

AG: I agree...

(QUOTING)"doubt and doubtful... maybe followed by a subordinate clause beginning with that, whether, or if: I doubt that (or whether or if) the story is true. It is doubtful that (or whether or if) the story is true. There is some doubt that (or whether or if) the story is true." (Lexico Dictionaries | English, 2019)

So...

SS: Maybe we need to make a sentence about doubt of and doubt in design.

AG: Indeed...

(QUOTING) "to be uncertain about; consider questionable or unlikely; hesitate to believe, to distrust." (Lexico Dictionaries | English, 2019)

There are obviously certain levels that you can begin to doubt and it moves into distrusting. The dictionary definition is

(QUOTING) "to be uncertain about something; be undecided in opinion or belief." (Lexico Dictionaries | English, 2019)

And then the noun that attaches itself.

(QUOTING) "a feeling of uncertainty about the truth, reality, or nature of something. distrust. a state of affairs such as to occasion uncertainty." (Lexico Dictionaries | English, 2019)

I think if I can relate that to a relatively recent example. I was working with survivors of abuse and it was a collaborative project with students from Cinematic arts and also students from Textile Art, Design and Fashion and also Art therapy students.

They were fine when working with their hands and making things and learning new skills such as knitting and crochet. There was a clear desire to learn new skills or enhance their skills. However, they did ask us about the filming the project, is – "Is this to make the university look good?" We were surprised that they felt this way and this was clear evidence that they had doubts about our motivations and rationale for the project, with good reason. This was really interesting because while we had asked them for their opinions and ideas at the outset, and we had asked what they would like to learn, and the types of workshops that they would like to be involved in, when it came to documenting the progress mid-way through the project they were actually wondering what's this all about. So sometimes actually explaining or just being truthful and communicating

clearly and transparently is important because it was about creating a sense of belonging and a sense of mindfulness through making and having the satisfaction of producing a textile artwork at the end. The final outcome was that the work produced would be showcased at an International conference. They wanted to visually articulate and have their voices heard collectively. I realised that while it was important to have a voice and raise awareness through the final artwork, it was the process of gently talking and building confidence that they were most interested in.

SS: It is positive that they felt they could ask you that. Actually, one thing that keeps entering my thoughts when considering these questions is how important trust and consent are in terms of design and care. And if we are talking about people's frustrations and doubts, like you say there is that sliding scale of trusting and doubting and then real mistrusting and I think that would be a really useful thing to map out as a diagram maybe as part of this to try and make sense of it. So, we could draw it as a visual... it feels like a visual to me.

AG: Always good to visualise.

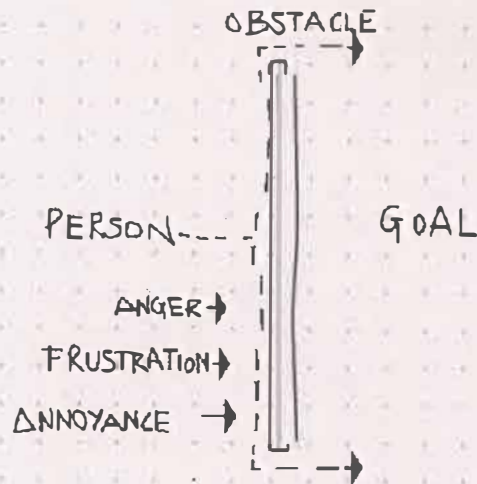
SS: Let's grab some of that paper here. And some pens.
(WE GET PENS AND PAPER)

Okay so Alison is mapping out a visual of frustration...

AG: This is a definition of frustration. We were talking about sliding scales. We might have a number of these pages but they are the emotional response to opposition... relating to anger or annoyance...

A Visual Definition of Frustration

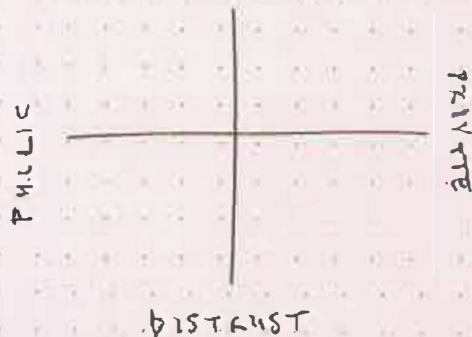
IMAGE 1 - ALISON - OBSTACLES CREATE FRUSTRATIONS



Where do frustrations and doubts manifest?

IMAGE 2 - SALLY - WHERE DO FRUSTRATIONS MANIFEST?

SS: This is what I mean. I can have issues with the reductive nature of TRUST



diagrams. so this is illustrative, but it is trying to locate where frustrations and doubts may manifest. I think they might exist within these axes. I see levels of uncertainty in frustrations and doubts that relate to trust, and mistrust. In relation to care, and design in the context of care, trust is crucial. Frustrations and doubts can be public and private so I will make that the other axis.

AG: I think a good point of reference for describing frustration could be Artist Christine Sun Kim, who channels her Frustration and Anger into Pie Charts. Christine Sun Kim in her series of large-format charcoal drawings explores the difficulties of navigating the hearing world as a deaf person. The six works pair depictions of varying mathematical angles with correlative, rage-inducing encounters that are both broadly applicable - "being given a Braille menu at a restaurant" or "offered a wheelchair at an airport" - and painfully specific to her experience - "curators who think it's fair to split my fee with interpreters." (Nytimes.com, 2019). I think that the charcoal artworks are insightful into the frustrations and anger that can be keenly felt. If design is going to care and put effective systems in place it needs to fully understand all aspects and be totally inclusive.

SS: Frustrations and doubts are not static either.

AG: There are multiple entry and exit points. Frustrations and doubts ensure that design can be constantly in a state of flux.

SS: Yes, they are constantly in flux, coming and going. If you attend to some, you can also let in others. Like closing and opening doors. As we address complex and challenging issues of radical changes they will be there. I would be concerned if they were not there, as that would mean that we are not pushing hard enough. We need to stay with the trouble as Donna Haraway says (Haraway, 2016). Engage with, understand and stay with frustrations and doubts in order to make any meaningful change.

IMAGE 3 – ALISON - MESSY MOVING FRUSTRATIONS AND DOUBTS.



Trust and Distrust

SS: Shall we talk about the word 'people' in the question. Whose frustrations and doubts, trust and distrust are we thinking of here? For me, this also relates to consent.

This could be people's experiences interacting with designs (systems, spaces, objects, products etc), the discipline of design, or designers, design researchers, or those working within the design industry - which can be an immensely frustrating and doubtful industry to work in. From my personal and professional experience, a lack of respect and understanding of design decisions, value engineering, is a problem for trust within design professions. What is designed is so often not delivered. Compromise can lead to serious frustrations and doubts for practitioners.

In my doctoral research, which is about design and public breastfeeding, I encounter distrust from those who may think I am using design to commodify, sell or exploit something for profit. Design, and its long-standing relationship with capitalism is ultimately responsible for this

distrust. It takes a while to break down these barriers and many people still don't get it. This adds challenges to interdisciplinary, or multidisciplinary projects as I feel that I need to explain what design is and isn't, in order to generate trust and have any kind of meaningful conversations outside the discipline. I met a midwife who originally trained as an Architect, she got it straight away!

Design as a discipline is also a long way from being inclusive which can lead to, I think quite rightly a lack of trust in the discipline. Work needs to be done, to decolonise design, education, practice and research. Going back to the feminist beginnings of this conversation, intersectionality is fundamental. The inequalities within design in particular gender, racial and class inequities in the UK are such a problem. We need to continue making the case of the importance of perspectives in design. There remain so many barriers within design education and practice meaning multiple perspectives are still simply missing. This has to not be about 'co-designing' perspectives in, but getting a balance of perspectives into the whole discipline. This is also about being critical of all modes and models of thinking.

Issues of trust and distrust, frustration and doubts, also throws up issues of consent. What is being *consented to* in matters of design and care.

AG: Yes, the balance of perspectives is most important. Designers and design can be powerful change agents. Design can be political and the design choices we make can be political and therefore open to exclude and perhaps even potentially oppress or damage people and the planet. If we think about the opposite of frustrations and doubt we have fulfilment and empowerment, when pursuing and achieving our goals.

If you think about the stats on PPE with the design generally relating mainly to men, the risk to women on the roads as a result of most cars and safety interventions being based on the average man, we could go on, mobile phones, toolkits, bricks, height of luggage racks etc. All designers should be feminists!

The designer is often full of frustration and self-doubt and as we have

previously discussed and this can be a motivator to problem solving and bringing solutions to a range of identified problems – designers can often be the sign-post to good and successful practice. Designers are often tasked with bringing ‘low cost’ solutions to big Global problems, design can remove the major costs to suppliers and or customers and identify what is already available. The digital economy can be used to create a more frugal economy, we can think of how the smart phone has revolutionized education in many African and emerging economies. Design can bring together existing assets and share them across sectors in efficient, inclusive and sustainable ways. Often emerging economies are already operating in a way that have brought solutions and innovations to underdeveloped regions. (Harvard Business Review, 2019)

Thinking about care recipients, they are often full of frustration, self-doubt and distrust of care-givers and designers/solution seekers – asking what are the motivations? And how have we been considered, included in the discourse around the correct design approach and outcome, there should be user-centered design solutions.

The care-givers/caretakers – are often full of frustration, disappointment, guilt, resentment and distrust and are in survival mode. Systems and procedural design can create high levels of frustration and distrust.

Designing with and for frustrations and doubts

SS: How can we move this forward? I think there are three things here.

- 1 Firstly, what is specific to design that can enable or ‘go with’, or engage with frustrations and doubts?
- 2 Secondly, it is important to recognise that we are in a situation of political and planetary crisis. Design has a unique role to play within change making agendas. If real changes are to be made to deal with urgent issues of sustainable development, I don’t think we can avoid potentially offending people which inevitably can lead to conflict, tensions and frustrations.
- 3 And lastly – design is frustrating for many, for many reasons. Fundamentally I do not feel that it is well understood or respected as a

discipline by others.

AG: Yes, other disciplines are more respected, science for example is able to highlight the problems but not always able to fix them, that is often in the domain of design or at least in collaborative design. Time is running out, there is a real sense of urgency this is the key issue and when you think about the level of fake news, green washing, pretence and an overwhelming sense of is it even possible to return from the precipice of disaster, extinction. We need to bring the masses with us and design can do this. So, we need to explore how design can help to build

- Trust,
- Belonging,
- Engagement,
- Mutual respect and understanding.

How can design address the doubts around various Agenda’s and Questioning motivations by promoting greater understanding and teams that will bring both Dogma and Compromise. We need to identify the obstacles and impediments to progress and come to a point where it can successfully eradicate division and isolation. Creating a community of practice through collaboration and understanding how to scale this up.

SS: I think for me, most importantly in relation to this question is how design can get better at embracing uncertainty while recognising, identifying and attending to these frustrations and doubts. At being confused and going with this confusion... acknowledging the messy uncertainty in all design work, recognising the value of that. We can bring design anthropology theory from Yoko Akama, Sarah Pink and Shanti Sumartojo in here. In their 2018 book ‘Uncertainty and Possibility’ they talk about uncertainty as technology for disruption, acknowledging the uneasy experiences that come with this. Embracing uncertainty and avoiding affirmative design in order to avoid reproducing the status quo.

Okay so I have revised the diagram.

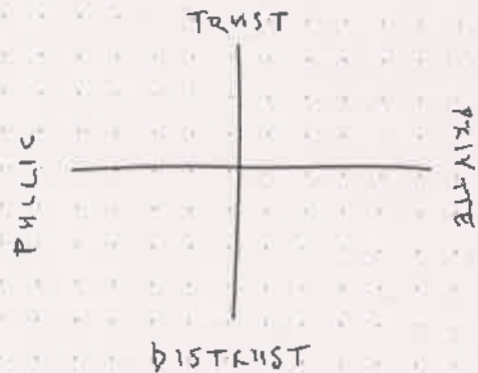


IMAGE 4 – SALLY - SCALES OF TRUST AND UNCERTAINTY

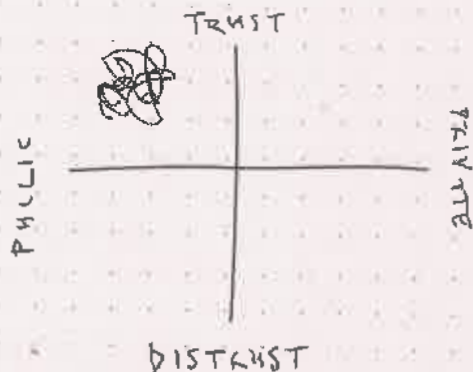


IMAGE 5 – SALLY - CARING AND DESIGNING WITHIN UNCERTAIN TRUST

SS: I think it is worth considering what it means for design and care if we work here where I have used red?

From our examples and conversation, it is possible that the discipline of design, which includes broadly practice, research and education needs to better articulate itself and its boundaries in order to build trust of the

discipline. There is no one way that we work, everyone in this workshop has such different design approaches. Plurality is important. We can respect this plurality, negotiate and make sense of this is important for trust to develop.

So back to the question - Can Design Care for people's frustrations and doubts?

Design must care *with* frustrations and doubts. Embracing uncertainty, and actively acknowledging that this will exist, using it and going with it. However, we must in addition work to build trust. Trust of design, within design and in our designing. This might go some way to care for design and for care. Caring for people's frustrations and doubts in and of design. Not necessarily trying to fix them, but recognizing them and going with them.

Akama, Y., Pink, S. & Sumartojo, S. 2018, Uncertainty and possibility: new approaches to future making in design anthropology, Bloomsbury Academic, London.

Haraway, D.J. 2016, Staying with the trouble: making kin in the Chthulucene, Duke University Press, Durham.

Harvard Business Review. (2019). Tackling Big Global Challenges with Low-Cost Innovation. [online] Available at: <https://hbr.org/2016/02/tackling-big-global-challenges-with-low-cost-innovation?autocomplete=true> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2019].

Lexico Dictionaries | English. (2019). English Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar Help | Lexico.com. [online] Available at: <https://www.lexico.com/en> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2019].

Nytimes.com. (2019). An Artist Who Channels Her Anger Into Pic Charts. [online] Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/21/t-magazine/christine-sun-kim-artist.html> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2019].

