« 9 » Although research problems in design research can be unique and difficult to generalize, reflective practice focuses on the designers' actions and endeavors (experience), with respect to conjectural conversations with the situation, to reinterpret and improve the problem as a whole (Schön 1983). In case of RTD 2015, the problem was how to compose a conference with an experimental and discursive format to disseminate research through design. It was reinterpreted by delegates' meaningful interaction with artifacts and with one another, so that knowledge about design research and roles of artifacts in research inquiry was generated and shared (§74).

« 10 » The creative yet rational exploration in the Rooms of Interest supported delegates' reflection on their thinking, actions and feelings as related to their experience of the conference – it is a critical process of reflection-on-action (Schön 1983: 275–283). When delegates' reflection-on-action in a Room of Interest was documented through scribing, the scribe documentation could become an activator for further reflection-on-action by the scribes who documented that Room of Interest and then by delegates who were not present there. Rooms of Interest served as performative exploration with an aim of constructing a model for research dissemination that combines linguistic with non-linguistic presentations and promotes interactive knowledge exchange.

Recommendations

« 11 » Although RTD 2015 was a success in my view as a delegate, there is room for improvement, with challenges ahead. A tension to be addressed is the inclusion of artifacts in the central exhibition. If RTD aims to focus on "design as a knowledge-generating activity" (§56), the conference ought to encourage presentations of artifacts in progress and documentation of their making process, rather than completed artifacts alone. This is to disclose how the artifacts actually arise from the process of design practice carried out for research inquiry and what purposes the practice has within the research, whether it (1) poses a research problem, (2) provides a context of inquiry, (3) serves as a research method or (4) provides evidence to support outcomes of research (Niedderer & Roworth-Stokes 2007).

By doing so, embodied knowledge that may not be fully articulated can be apprehended through artifacts, thus contributing to the advancement of design epistemology.

« 12 » The role of curation must be played in the peer-review stage to ensure the inclusion of design processes evidenced by ongoing artifacts, unsuccessful experiments and documentation of the processes, such as research diaries, videos, photographs, etc. The double peer review could be structured in a way that one reviewer (external) focuses on the submission's quality and rigor of argumentation that corresponds to academic criteria while the other (internal) concentrates on the curation of submitted artifacts and of "research, discussions, experiences and provocations" (§63), evaluating the quality of the artifacts as such and their roles in research.

« 13 » Organizers may examine other platforms for efficacious dissemination of practice-based research. An example that can be used as a starting point is the international conference series "The Art of Research" (AOR)[1] held biennially at Aalto University in Finland. By examining other similar platforms, some insight may be gained into how artifacts and their visual presentations can be combined with textual presentations to demonstrate:

- how knowledge may be embodied in artifacts and their creation; and
- how artifacts and their creation may be contextualized in a research process as outcomes and a method respectively – the epistemological challenges for this form of research.

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1 | The first conference took place in 2005 under the name "CHIASMA2005: Combining Art and Design Practices with Research." The conference series was rebranded to "The Art of Research" in 2007.

The RTD Community and the Big Picture

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> **Upshot** · The Research Through Design (RTD) conferences represent important steps towards more meaningful academic practices, not only within the field of research through design but potentially for many related academic fields. In order to realize this potential, I would like to take a step back and look at the RTD community in the context of a larger academic landscape.

« 1 » To start from the beginning: the account of the background and emergence of research through design that opens the target article is, to the best of my knowledge, comprehensive and accurate. It leads on to the suggestion that new dissemination platforms are needed (§15), which I strongly agree with. As I see it, academic knowledge production is nothing but an ongoing discourse in a research community, and it seems clear to me that the communicative infrastructures employed by a research community are going to have an impact on the form and qualities of its discourse.

« 2 » Like the authors, I have also found the predominance of text formats and conventionalized conference rituals to be a potential problem for design-based research. I was therefore very interested in the ideas behind the RTD conference when first hearing about it in the summer of 2014, and tried to put some effort into developing a strong submission in order to be accepted to the 2015 conference and have a chance to experience it first hand. I was fortunate to make it through the selection process, and thus I can give some comments on the article based on my trip to Cambridge in March 2015.

« 3 » In a nutshell, the sense I came away with is one of contributing to an emerging research community. This is also borne out in the article, where the authors reflect on two iterations of the experimental RTD conference format and discuss how it can / should be further developed as a "dialogical platform" for the research-through-

design community. I do not have much to add on the level of specifics – as already stated, I find the account of the genesis of the field accurate and I share the authors' concerns. But what I might be able to do is to take a step back and look at a slightly larger picture of growing a research community in a large academic landscape of existing research communities, norms, practices, funding schemes, degree structures, job opportunities and so on.

« 4 » The authors talk about the RTD conference as being experimental with respect to knowledge forms and dissemination media, recognizing the potential knowledge value of artifacts, performative pieces, etc. (§28). But perhaps we need to look at how such experiments are turned into progress for the research-through-design community. For me, the key to understanding research as knowledge production is in criteria for judging the quality of proposed knowledge contributions – this is really what is behind the prevalent emphasis on "scientific method" – but we need to think about for whom the criteria are formulated and by whom they are used. On a similar note, the authors' report on the RTD 2015 review process and how it was perceived by attendees (§43) suggests that an attempt was made to apply rigorous academic review and selective acceptance for an audience that in part lacks experience with such practices, and possibly also in part lacks the incentive to follow them. Again, there is a question of where the RTD experiment hopes to take the research-through-design community.

« 5 » I would like to try to address these questions by seeing the RTD conferences as part of an effort to grow a research community on research through design in the context of an existing academic landscape. This implies an inherent tradeoff between existing, established norms on one hand, and the needs and forms of practice that are specific to the nature of research-through-design work on the other. To lay out a few starting observations on research through design:

- Design practice is part of the knowledge-production process. This is non-negotiable, an essential property of the emerging community – but it is certainly not obvious to academia outside the community what it means.

- Artifacts carry knowledge – but not necessarily the kinds of knowledge that are intelligible outside the emerging community.

- It is the responsibility of the emerging community to agree on criteria for judging the quality of knowledge contributions – and those criteria could conceivably be quite alien to those used in neighboring academic communities.

« 6 » Coming back to the tradeoff, and simplifying rather drastically, we could discern two extreme-point scenarios: the emerging community could choose to (1) celebrate its uniqueness, by focusing on knowledge-production, dissemination and assessment processes that are meaningful to members of the community. Or it could choose to (2) situate itself in relation to the existing research landscape.

« 7 » Scenario 1 offers the convenience of collaboration among peers with shared beliefs, values and, most importantly, a shared language. However, as indicated in the starting observations above, my sense is that the research through design community on its own would develop in ways that would depart from the practices of surrounding communities. Since research through design is a rather small research community, I find this scenario less interesting due to the considerable risks of inbreeding and of withering from lack of critical mass.

« 8 » In scenario 2, the emerging community would, however reluctantly, accept the hegemony of text in the surrounding academic landscape. This would imply, among other things, a priority on textual articulations of research through design's epistemologies of practice (§59), much like the forms for artistic-research Ph.Ds, which seem to have converged on creative work plus exegesis in related research communities. It would also imply a continued focus on rigorous peer review and selective acceptance in order to establish the external value of the community in the only universal currency of the academic landscape, namely archival publications.

« 9 » Note, though, that scenario 2 does not only require the emerging research-through-design community to comply with existing norms. To the contrary, I think the RTD conference experiments point to a way forward that would also be of immediate

and great interest to many neighboring research communities. It is straightforward to see, for instance, how the design crit formats of the Rooms of Interest could improve the quality and attendee experience of many conferences in related fields (if the insights on facilitation that are reported in §§68–71 are properly taken into account). The importance of curation (§63) is another significant example of an immediately transferable insight.

« 10 » Finally, I think it follows that a conference offering the kinds of innovative format improvements demonstrated by the RTD has the potential to form a venue for situated production of knowledge that is significant to the whole research community, including the members who were not able to attend the conference. Thus we join the authors in arriving at the question of documenting the knowledge outcomes of the conference (which I find more relevant in the context of scenario 2 than "capturing the conference experience"). The authors' discussion of this topic in §§66f seems to concentrate mostly on incremental improvements to the RTD 2015 scribe format. However, to me, the most interesting opening is found in the attendee survey data, where some respondents mention their own potential ability to serve as scribes.

« 11 » From the point of view of scenario 2, it is possible to develop a vision of conference attendees sharing the responsibility for building the knowledge outcomes of the conference at the conference. This is not the place to address how it should be done in detail, and it would require breaking free from a whole range of established expectations on conference-going, but a fruitful starting point could be to integrate a layer of annotation and discussion into the Rooms of Interest, building on top of the published papers. One could imagine a facilitator role complementary to the session chair, having the responsibility for the annotation / discussion layer of the archival proceedings of the session in question, and using an appropriate shared platform for facilitating and formatting the collaborative construction of meaningful documented insights and reflections as the session happens. In effect, the co-constructed material would form part of the archival conference proceedings, connected directly to its conceptual point of

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origin, thus potentially becoming meaningful and generative to the research community after the conference.

« 12 » As a closing reflection on the "Closing reflections" (§72), I have all sympathy for the aim to establish a commonly understood language, but it may be necessary to start by asking who is doing the understanding. In my simplified dichotomy above, is it the emerging research-through-design community (scenario 1) or is it the context in which the emerging community is situated (scenario 2)? I believe that the way forward and the decisions to be taken ahead are strongly contingent on the answer to that question.

« 13 » And personally, I think that it is much more important to build connections across research communities than to erect yet another silo, even if it means dealing with difficult tradeoffs.

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The Making of a Conference

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> Upshot • The practice of thoughtful conference design helps to preserve the research conference as a vital arena for knowledge construction and exchange.

« 1 » First things first, full disclosure: I am a serial conference organiser and am currently organising a large design research conference so am wrestling with the issues that the authors deal very effectively with in Abigail Durrant et al.'s target article. It centres around research that is conducted through design and how best to present and talk about it, but more generally in an age of high bandwidth and seamless connectivity we might ask: Why have an academic con-

ference at all? What knowledge and legacy does physically being together in a place generate, and how is that accessible to others? Arguably, the physicality of practice-based work makes being situated in the same place more important but still, why not figure out a way of putting the whole thing online?

« 2 » The case against is clear. Twenty years ago, without our mobile phones, iPads and laptops, a conference offered a place to listen and focus, to present unknown work, and discuss ideas free from day-to-day life, cosseted in a conference bubble. But the bubble popped a while ago. Look around you at a conference now and you see people that are barely present at all: sending quotations and opinion to their Twitter feeds, solving staffing problems back home, or emailing that important review for a deadline just missed. They are there but not there, participating but not contributing.

« 3 » The conference has become more of a flow than a thing. TED,[1] with a simple formatting move and nice take on design, has kick-started the attention-grabbing, inspirational, presentation that now plays out in commercial contexts at ever lower levels. Delegates leave inspired by a captivating story, but not necessarily any the wiser. And that brings us back to the point of an academic research conference: openness about method, subject, object, and process should (in theory) leave delegates with a head full of new ideas, a bunch of new connections, and the research community enriched until the next time. The conference, traditionally the start of new dialogue, now finds itself in the midst of continuing dialogue. The most it can do is to channel and record the flow of discourse.

« 4 » Against this context, I found the article a considered and informative account of a process to develop new formats for conference participation in the area of practice-

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1 | According to the TED Website, https://www.ted.com/about/our-organization: "TED is a nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less). TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment and Design converged, and today covers almost all topics – from science to business to global issues – in more than 100 languages."

based design work. This is an area where the traditional paper-presentation format, in its "backward" reporting of results, limits what can be discussed about the "forward" potential of a design artefact. The "Rooms of Interest" (§47) central to RTD 2015, and the most fundamental attempt to get away from the traditional "lecture" format, represent a way to open up discussion around physical artefacts, and includes researchers operating in organisational contexts. The Rooms of Interest are positively assessed by the authors, though the participants are seemingly more ambivalent. That could be said of the other attempts at format-changing too (§33), and I think the reporting of audience response slightly diminishes the contribution of the article, the achievement of the conference, and the careful thought behind its many components.

« 5 » The target article does show how difficult it is to take the conventions and terminology of the academic conference (§60) and confound the expectations that these bring in a way that is both understandable and coherent to a broad range of researchers, who may only be partially engaged in the lead up to a conference. The ingredients that arguably make for an effective conference – good organisation, good chairing and facilitation, a few unexpected items, formal mixed with informal – evidently remain as important as they ever were (§47).

« 6 » I am of course biased by the conference I am attempting to design, and I use the word "design" very deliberately. What I think this article best presents is the *practice* of conference design, the process of working out what kind of things to specify for submission (§31), what kind of discussions and dialogues will fit the geography of place (§27), what the available technology can do to enhance understanding (§38), and how best to attract and corral participants. That requires thinking at a number of levels, but as the article shows, those levels need to be integrated and understandable, from the paper format, to the checkboxes at submission, to the communication of intentions throughout. The organisation of RTD 2015 is clearly shown to have developed from the prototype of RTD 2013 and I am sure RTD 2017 will develop further still in that ongoing flow of dialogue within the research through design and wider community.