

The Possibility of Protest

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The Possibility of Protest

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Abstract

Design research is inherently both social and political. We are living and working in times of great unrest and upheaval, and we feel that our work must increasingly reflect this. We propose this workshop to engage with the material practices of protest. These range from long-held traditions of banners and badges to more emergent forms of zines, stickers, tattoos, and visible repairs. We propose a day of making and exchange to engage these practices. We will explore the materiality of the protest banner as a surface of collective expression, while also emphasizing care, repair, and feminist practices of collective knowledge-making in design research. Practically, we will be making banners, stickers, and temporary tattoos, using a speculative trade union as a unifying structure for discussions around care and justice in design.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Human computer interaction (HCI)**.

Keywords

Protest, making, material driven design, collaboration

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1 Overview

We propose a day of making together at the Aarhus Decennial on the theme of protest. We ground this in the making of protest banners that can be seen as manifestations of collective resistance, together with stickers and tattoos that function as more personal commitments. We make this proposal in acknowledgment and gratitude for the role collective action and solidarity have played in making our lives possible. We envision the workshop as a place to continue the building of shared ground through making and storytelling.

The materiality of protest will be explored as a political and performative device to discuss strategies for more open and equitable ways of doing design research. Through fabulation and speculative fiction, [33], we will create a temporary trade union as a structure to gather around the notions of care, repair, and justice in design research.

The workshop will be used as a temporary site to engage participants in making side-by-side, to share and imagine stories of protest and resistance. Drawing from feminist practices of collective knowledge-making, we aim to make space for individual voices, whilst creating shared ground through the act of making itself. The signs of protest will range from the discreet to the loud, from the widely distributed sticker to the large and unwieldy banner. These materials will be used as conversational sites to discuss strategies and commitments to community organising in research, through the language of protest.

The outcomes of the day will serve as performative and visual acts of dissent that highlight personal perspectives while generating collective insights. We will consider ways of leaving behind traces



Figure 1: Left: Elvia Vasconcelos. 2022. My research methods form a politics from what they question. What about yours? Right: Mafalda Gamboa. 2024. Stay with the trouble + be the trouble

of alternative ways of knowing that participants can carry forward into the rest of the conference.

The work will be documented during the day and alongside the banners and stickers themselves, through a small zine to be distributed at the conference. We will also consider other ways to allow the conversation to continue after the workshop.

2 Protest

Research through design [13, 15, 18] and material-driven design [28] use making as a way to construct knowledge. At the same time Participatory Design [24, 32], Action Research [5, 22, 25, 30, 37, 40] and Co-Design [8, 23, 39, 42] are based on a long history of activism [11, 14, 31, 34] and making voices heard inside design processes [7]. Given these complex times, we believe that it is of increasing importance for design researchers to revisit these origins to work within frameworks of justice and sustainability [19, 21, 36] to find ways to express solidarity and care.

As a framework for the workshop, we propose a fabulated union through the making of protest banners, stickers and temporary tattoos as sites for exploring commitments to resistance for the future. This framing can be seen in direct relation to projects such as New World Embassy [35], Unionising the speculative [41], Elgaland-Vargaland [38], The Secret Post Office [12] and The Battle of Orgreave [10] in which performance and the construction of temporary parallel institutions are central to the imagining of alternative outcomes.

Meanwhile, materiality has long been used as a political and performative device. We take inspiration from works that use textiles to convey political concerns [9], rooted in a long history of textiles and their socio-political constructs [27]. This is directly related to a feminist stance on design research [1, 2], that we use to frame our work as situated knowledges [20], fictions [6], and critical fabulations [29]. We believe there is fundamental value in engaging with the creation of physical and material aspects of these critical discourses.

We hope that the open format of the workshop will welcome many voices to shape the direction and focus of the day's work. As we will be engaged in collaborative making, we are hoping for the results of the workshop to be layered and intersectional, manifesting conversation composites [16] in physical form. This proposal builds on previous making-centered gatherings such as the workshops "Crafting a place for attending to the things of design" [26] at CHI2017, "Doing things with research through design: with what, with whom, and toward what ends?" [3] at CHI2019, "Memoirs for the future, imaginations of the past: crafting samplers for intent and commitment" [4] and "More Samples of One: Weaving First-Person Perspectives into Mainstream HCI Research" [17], both at DIS2024. In these workshops, researchers have argued that we should pay attention to the things we make in research through design, the importance of making alongside each other, and expressing personal and collective perspectives.

3 Workshop structure

This workshop will take place from morning to late afternoon, with an optional social dinner in the evening. The main activity will be making together as a unifying task throughout the day, but also intended as a way to hold the space for conversations and the sharing of techniques, stories and experiences.

The making activities of the day will be inspired by the work and practices of both participants and workshop organizers as seen in the figures. As a result, the workshops brings elements of both personal and collective resistance, offering a balance between first-person perspectives and shared experience. Participants will be encouraged to express personal perspectives through intimate objects like stickers or tattoos, whilst contributing to larger collective gestures through shared banner-making.

The physical banners, stickers, and tattoos will serve as lasting expressions, but the small zine documenting the collective processes of the day will be a way to engage the ephemeral nature of protest and its possibilities for repair and care. The zine can function as a



Figure 2: Helen Milne. 2017. Protest Flags.

tangible artifact that extends the workshop’s influence beyond the event.

4 Potential Outcomes

- **Banners & Stickers:** Representing a spectrum of protests, from loud, large banners to personal, intimate stickers.
- **Zine:** A tangible collection of insights, reflections, and images documenting the day’s activities and future visions for protest and care in design research.
- **Pictorial:** To submit a pictorial for next year’s conference, this workshop could generate rich visual and narrative content that could inspire others in the field to think about protest, care, and repair in design research.
- **Performative elements:** The making process could also involve performative elements, where participants collectively discuss or enact certain aspects of protest, bringing the speculative and fabulative facets into a performative dimension.

5 Learning goals

Through the artifacts created during the workshop, participants will contribute and gain an understanding of the materialities of the deeply personal and collective aspects of resistance. We propose that this may form the basis for a longer engagement with the commitments and framings of our design research work.

6 Plans for dissemination of workshop results

The workshop will be documented in several ways:

In preparation for the day, we will build a website similar to <https://memoirs-samplers-commitments.glitch.me/>, with all the necessary information. This website will be updated with the results afterwards.

We will work with the workshop chairs for exploring dissemination options during the conference - this could, for example, take the form of organizing a temporary display of the artifacts (banners, booklet, posters) created during the workshop.

The results of the workshop will be documented and used to inform a pictorial, a booklet and a critique.

7 Participant recruitment strategy

The workshop is designed with design researchers in mind, but is open to all who are interested. No specific prior knowledge or skill is required to participate. Participants will be recruited via word of mouth and various social media platforms (such as LinkedIn and Instagram) as well as through the networks of the organisers. We will also be distributing an email call for attendance.

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