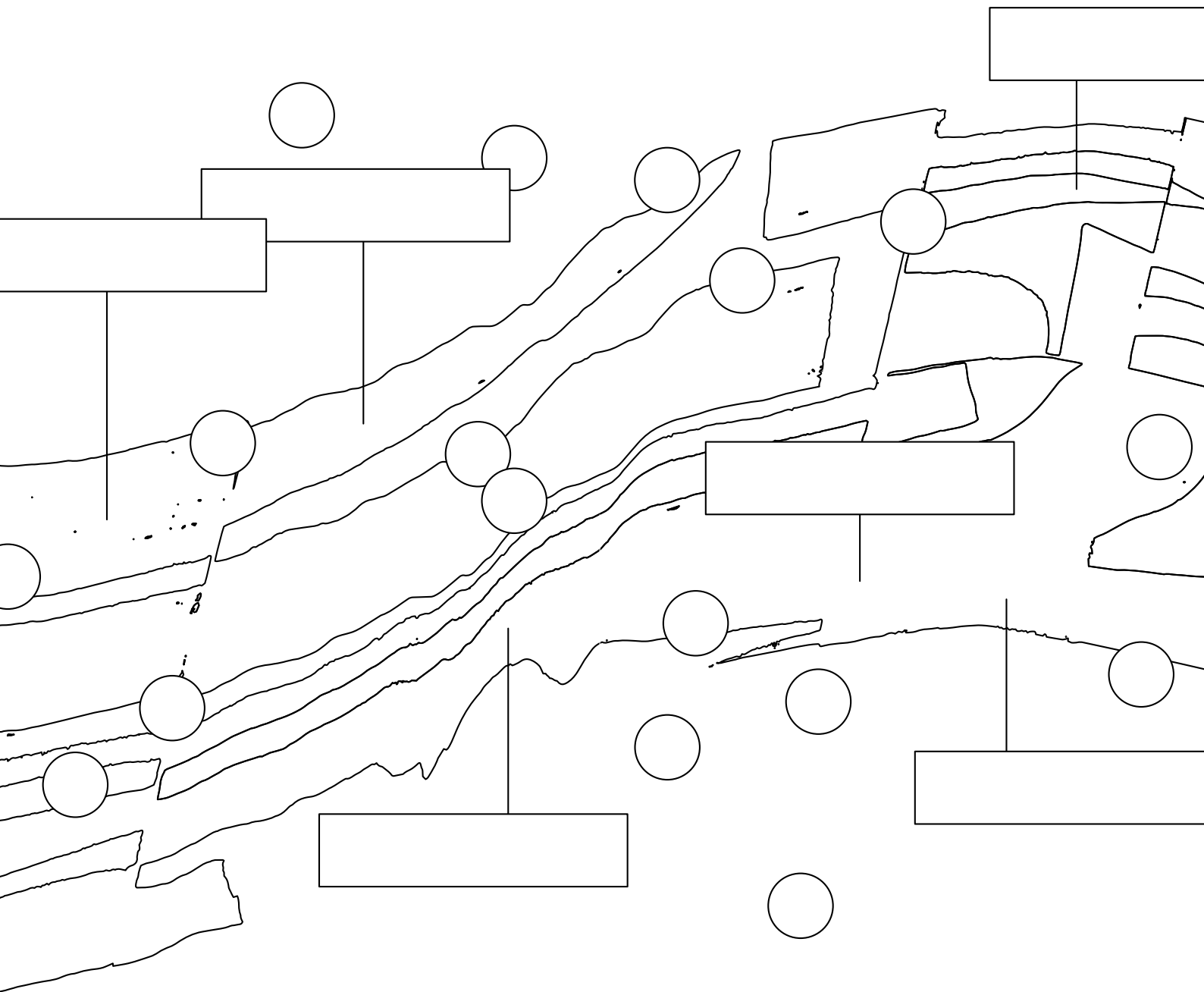


COUNTER- FACTUAL HISTORIES



SURF

[Pilot package]

- 2 The creation of a counterfactual timeline based on a different outcome of one or more of the events identified on the real timeline. One of the key benefits of this approach is the necessity to understand complex histories and how they inform or influence design practice. Experiment with different themes and examine the potential consequences. Remember that the further back in time the more divergent the alternative present will be, and therefore more fictional and complicated to manage – as Ray Bradbury’s classic tale “A Sound of Thunder” illustrates (Bradbury 2005).
- 3 The design of things along the new timeline: hypothetical products, advertising campaigns, images and texts – evidence of the new value system in action.

DELIVERABLES

- 1 Two podcasts or slideshows that discuss current methods and strategies for the workshop project. The background is to be discussed well ahead of the project and needs to involve experts on the theme and object of the project. The researched object then becomes the interpretational artefact of the different design languages.
- 2 Gallery of schemas and sketches for developing visions and concepts of the proposed task.
- 3 Description of the design process, preferably with intermediate solutions.
- 4 Final image of the proposed task with the description of its meaning.

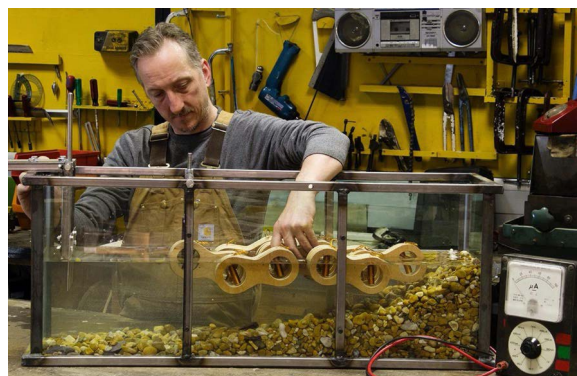
REFERENCE PROJECT

In *A New Scottish Enlightenment*, Mohammed J. Ali postulates on a different outcome to the 1979 Scottish independence referendum. In his version a ‘yes’ vote led to the creation of a new Scottish government whose goal was the delivery of energy independence for its citizens, paving the way for a future free from fossil fuels (and the corporations that control them). The project was first exhibited three months before the September 2014 Scottish independence referendum. This starting point (a simple yes/no vote) resonates because it vividly presents to the audience a life that could have been. It makes us think about the power of our own votes and the potential implications or missed opportunities of a ‘bad choice’.

The second aspect that gives the project a more general relevance is the agenda used to drive the extrapolation from its fictional starting point – a simple paradigm shift on energy generation and distribution. This is obviously a topical issue globally, however, contemporary approaches to alternative energy generation tend to happen through piecemeal developments or divisive policy shifts. By *New Scotland* defining ‘citizen energy independence’ as its national goal, it becomes possible to begin outlining the ways through which this might happen. The *Energy Intellectual Property Rights Act of 1984*, for example, removes intellectual property rights for energy technologies as they are perceived as a barrier to the development of energy technology research; *the Public Energy Act of 1985* sees individuals encouraged to prototype their own generating machines, and the *Third Millennium Prize of 2000* is a competition held to rapidly realise the long sought-after dream of unlimited energy through nuclear fusion.

One of the key strengths of the counterfactual approach is how the extrapolation can provide a clear timeline – a set of logical iterations that can be used to communicate and describe the gradual divergence over time. So, whilst alternative Scotland 2014 is highly fictitious, both in terms of societal structure and its use of technology, the vision succeeds because it makes clear how we might have arrived there had another choice been made 35 years ago. This project furthermore succeeds in plausibly combining political, economic, social, and technological elements in the fiction: a political agenda gives rise to new approaches to technology that encourage social and economic change. To communicate this alternative present, Ali decided to focus on the design of the technological artefacts. These were presented alongside government public information posters designed in the graphic language of the period.

Taking a more aesthetic approach to an alternate present is James Chambers’ project, *Attenborough Design Group* (ADG). He postulated on the existence of a research group within the electronics company Texas Instruments led by the famous natural historian, cultural icon and filmmaker, David Attenborough. The objects developed by the group, whilst based on orthodox and existing products, were given new behavioural rules exhibiting an underlying survival instinct inspired by complex evolved techniques in the animal kingdom. These new product behaviours act to enhance the chances of both physical survival through the inbuilt defence mechanisms, and emotive survival through eliciting a deeper relationship with the owner. This latter element was achieved through iterative behavioural prototyping, specifically based on anthropomorphising the various movements to elicit either sympathy (the *Gesundheit Radio* and *Floppy Legs*) or wariness (*Anti-Touch Lamp*).



???



Chambers’ project shifts the subject of the alternate history from socio/ political events to a subject more relevant to the design industry, examining notions of object obsolescence, value and meaning.

KEY STAGES

Phase 1

[20% project duration]

- 1 Project launch: Define problematic and construct related factual timeline.
- 2 Project review: Historical timeline.

Phase 2

[20% project duration]

Commence counterfactual strategy: Define bifurcation (moment(s) on factual timeline, experiment with consequences.

Phase 3

[60% project duration]

- 1 Design things along the counterfactual timeline
- 2 Final project review / mini-exhibition.

DETAILED SCHEDULE

PHASE 1

- 1 Project launch & starting the project:
 - Presentation of the brief and objectives of the workshop;
 - Presentation of the schedule and different steps;
 - Define the research subject (a list of examples is provided);
 - Examine the related issues (and the relationship to design): questions of resources, production, ethical issues, political problems, etc. Essentially, what is the contemporary problem you'd like to explore.
- 2 Exploring and documenting the theme
 - Research the key historical events that led to the problematic present:
 - election outcome, ignored patent, celebrity endorsement.
 - Document this history and begin developing a factual timeline.
- 3 Designing and presenting
 - Continued development of the timeline. This is a creative exercise. The timeline could be animated, 3-dimensional, fill the entire corridor. Think about how to highlight the key moments.
 - Project review: Historical timeline (5 mins of presentation per student. Share with the group a brief overview of the original timeline (not counterfactual))

Reflect on the counterfactual moment(s). Counterfactual histories commonly use *what if?* questions, for example: *What if* digitisation never happened? And then explore the consequences (40+ years of development into analogue technologies?) Start asking what if questions along your factual timeline.

PHASE 2

Choose a counterfactual moment.

- Present five what if questions (5 min per student).
- Deadline: you affirm your chosen path here. Formalise the counterfactual timeline identifying the key moments (that can align with or be influenced by real events). Identify design opportunities along the timeline for concepts and evidence from the new history.

PHASE 3

- 1 Development / prototyping: continue working on design proposals.
- 2 Finalise and communicate
- 3 Final counterfactual project presentation / individual presentations (20 minutes per student / 10 minutes student, 10 minutes feedback) Describe your creative process, critical stance and how you used the concept of the counterfactual to express critical thought.

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