

# *Dimensions of creative evaluation: Distinct design and reasoning strategies for aesthetic, functional and originality judgments*



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*We examined evaluative reasoning taking place during expert 'design critiques'. We focused on key dimensions of creative evaluation (originality, functionality and aesthetics) and ways in which these dimensions impact reasoning strategies and suggestions offered by experts for how the student could continue. Each dimension was associated with a specific underpinning 'logic' determining how these dimensions were evaluated in practice. Our analysis clarified how these dimensions triggered reasoning strategies such as running mental simulations or making design suggestions, ranging from 'go/kill' decisions to loose recommendations to continue without directional steer. The findings advance our theoretical understanding of evaluation behaviour in design and alert practicing design evaluators to the nature and consequences of their critical appraisals. © 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.*

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Evaluative practices are important in all creative industries, where key individuals are invited to assess products 'in-the-making' during initial, creative stages as well as finalised products prior to communicating them to the market (Amabile, 1982; Moeran & Christensen, 2013). Most creative industries have formalised specific roles for domain experts who help advance the initial creative process or who evaluate the final outcome at gates, reviews or screenings. The 'design critique', which is a key feature of design education, is one example of such an evaluative practice, taking the form of a friendly, critical appraisal aimed partly at evaluating the potential, novelty and value of the product in-the-making, but equally importantly serving to catalyse the pursuit of new lines of creative inquiry. The critique presents an opportunity for students to develop their own design values and preferences and to become aware of their own design sensibilities (McDonnell, 2014). In an educational setting the design critique also enables students to reflect upon both the design process and the state of the design, and allows the instructor to reflect on the students' performance (Cardoso, Eris, Badke-Schaub, & Aurisicchio, 2014). Design critiques may play out in

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many different relationships, from master–apprentice to peer critiques, using various modalities, including speech, gesture and sketching (Oh, Ishizaki, Gross, & Do, 2013). The outcome of design critiques may occasionally be a discarded project, but more frequently they initiate a series of investigations and creative processes aimed at strengthening the project.

The dialogue within design critiques (typically between an experienced designer and one or more less experienced designers) may take the form of an *exploratory* process that has as its input so-called ‘preinventive’ structures (e.g., sketches, more or less formalised ideas or concepts, and prototypes), in line with the conceptualisation of the creative process offered in the ‘Geneplore’ model (Finke, 1990; Finke, Ward, & Smith, 1992). This model considers exploratory processes (e.g., contextual shifting and form-before-function reasoning) as inherently ‘creative’ in nature. This implies that exploratory processes should not be overlooked and that the commonly held belief that creativity primarily concerns *generation* as opposed to *exploration* is mistaken. Indeed, existing design research further underscores the critical role of exploratory enquiry in design problem solving, as emphasised in the theory of problem–solution co-evolution (Dorst & Cross, 2001; Wiltchnig, Christensen, & Ball, 2013). According to this account, processes that alter the problem space such as problem re-framing and contextual shifting co-evolve with changes arising within the solution space. This iterative process of problem–solution co-evolution promotes creative discovery through the building of conceptual ‘bridges’ between the problem space and the solution space (cf. Cross, 1997).

When considering the potential for creative exploration within design critiques, we note that these critiques usually involve a dedicated and formalised role for the design evaluator, who is presented with a preinventive structure to evaluate and to help advance through an often collaborative process of problem–solution co-evolution. A typical design critique therefore allows for a clear distribution of roles: (1) a designer (or sometimes a design team) who has constructed an initial preinventive structure; and (2) a designer (frequently more experienced) who is exploring, evaluating and helping to develop that preinventive structure. The present research utilises this distribution of roles to examine the different dimensions of creative evaluation in industrial design education and the design strategies employed to enhance creative success. The analysis first and foremost examines how distinct evaluation logics affect the reasoning and progression suggestions of the experienced designer.

In relation to definitions of creativity, a consensus has emerged whereby for a product to be considered ‘creative’ it must display the properties of *novelty* (or *originality*) and *usefulness* to some domain (e.g., Amabile, 1996; Meyer, 1999; Plucker & Makel, 2010; Sarkar & Chakrabarti, 2011). While novelty is seen as the hallmark of creativity, the arguments for including the usefulness

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