

# Think with your hands, OR PROTOTYPE/ **SUBVERSIVE AFFIRMATION**

Rapid Prototyping Workshop developed by Simona Kicurovska/ Els Cornelis

June 2022

---

## **INTRODUCTION**

Prototypes

- involve creative acts of making
- are expressive artefacts
- are visualizations of phenomena
- are carriers to evoke discussion
- allow people to experience a situation that did not exist before

If you would like to have more information on the value of prototyping in exploring a situation or possible solutions to a problem, please refer to

- Ratto, M. (2011). *Critical Making: Conceptual and Material Studies in Technology and Social Life*, *The Information Society: An International Journal*, 27:4, 252-260
- Sanders, E. B.-N. Sanders & Stappers, P.J. (2014) Probes, toolkits and prototypes: three approaches to making in codesigning, *CoDesign: International Journal of CoCreation in Design and the Arts*, 10:1, 5-14
- Stappers, P.J., Sleeswijk Visser, F., & Keller, I. (2015). The role of prototypes and frameworks for structuring explorations by research through design. In P. Rodgers, & J. Yee (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to design research* (pp. 1-13). Routledge - Taylor & Francis Group.
- <https://www.designkit.org/methods/rapid-prototyping>
- <https://makersmanierenblogs.hku.nl/prototyping/>

## **SPECIFICITIES**

- The following instructions are written for use in workshops for groups of maximum 6 participants.
- Following the instructions below, the workshop takes approximately 2 hours in total.
- During the workshop the participants work in pairs. The preparation however is done individually.
- If you are giving the workshop, you are also the moderator. If you act as a group of equal participants within this workshop, one of the participants can take on the role of moderator, or you can choose to moderate collectively. In the latter case, all participants prototype, but they are, at the same time, all responsible for the moderator tasks. However, only choose this option if everyone participating is already acquainted

with this exercise. In the remainder of the instructions, we assume the presence of a moderator.

The moderator

- does not prototype and is not involved in a pair,
  - takes care of the timing of the rounds,
  - sees that the game rules are clear. Reading out loud the instructions of each round can be helpful.
  - helps the participants to clarify the questions before prototyping takes place,
  - leads the discussion at the end of the prototyping workshop.
- 
- During this prototyping workshop, exclusively use ANALOGUE, preferably RECYCLED or DURABLE, materials. Please collect in advance: large sheets of cardboard, markers, crayons, scissors, wooden sticks, string, yarn, threads, scraps of cloth, paper cups, coloured tape, garbage bags, ping-pong balls, balloons, rubber gloves, etc.. You can use really ANYTHING.
  - Thinking with your hands, or researching by making is essential in this workshop. This is something most of us are not used to – but try it out. It is fun. And valuable. Try not to lose yourself in verbal discussions but let the making lead the discussion; not the other way around.
  -

## PREPARATION

- Individually read the essay on Subversive Affirmation, [apria.artez.nl/subversive-affirmation/](http://apria.artez.nl/subversive-affirmation/)
- Highlight in the text what you consider to be the technique of subversive affirmation. What elements does it involve?
- Think of own experiences, something out of your everyday reality that you find intriguing, absurd, irritating, unbalanced, strange, funny, disgusting, ... Write down three experiences that come to mind.  
What is the activity or situation? What the underlying pattern, format, system? And what are your doubts, questions, reactions with respect to this situation and the patterns, formats, systems? What tension do you experience? Perhaps you think of a situation in public transport, in nightlife, at school or work. Perhaps there are experiences with respect to social issues such as climate change, consumerism,

racism, ableism, or the lack of involvement, care or pleasure you may experience in various fields you want to address. Any situation can be interesting as long as you keep in mind to stay close to your own, specific experiences.

- Here are some examples of situations to inspire you:
  - “Online presence in a live group gives a strikingly different presence. The online participant is somehow much more present with the sound via the laptop than the participants in the room. How could hybrid being together and hybrid collaboration become more equal?” (*workshop Rapid Prototyping/ Subversive Affirmation at HKU, March 4, 2022* )
  - “Street news vendors selling street news via a QR code, gives a weird aloof mind fuck. On the one hand, this creates a distance, the physical person becomes a digital one. On the other hand you immediately read someone's name and place of origin, which seems to be almost too personal.” (*Jolanda Schouten in collaboration with Hannie van den Bergh and Eva den Heijer - workshop Rapid Prototyping/ Subversive Affirmation at HKU, March 4, 2022*)
  - “I am slightly disabled and occasionally use a walking stick. Sometimes I have the strong impression that bystanders think I'm pathetic. I don't feel pathetic. And don't want to feel pathetic.” (*workshop Rapid Prototyping/ Subversive Affirmation at HKU, March 4, 2022* )

As you can notice, in all three examples there is an obvious experienced tension.

This tension is an important characteristic for the situations that can be tackled by subversive affirmation.

## **PROTOTYPING WORKSHOP**

There are two PROTOTYPING ROUNDS. Each round takes the same amount of time to complete (approximately 25 minutes). Each pair introduces two experiences or situations, both with a related question or wish in ROUND 0. The other pairs respond by making a prototype in ROUND 1 and ROUND 2. It is important to note that in both rounds, one does not prototype on the own situation, question or wish, but on the situation, question or wish that was introduced by another pair.

## **ROUND 0. INTRODUCING OF SITUATIONS** \ 10 minutes

DISCUSSING, SELECTING, DESCRIBING in pairs + 5 minutes PRESENTING per pair

10 minutes DISCUSSING, SELECTING, DESCRIBING in pairs

- Each pair discusses the essentials of subversive affirmation. What is the core of the technique of subversive affirmation? What elements does it entail?
- Subsequently, each pair chooses two specific situations. What situations would you as a pair like to be further explored? What would you like to reflect on, or see a possible solution for? What would you like to change or resolve? What would be your wish?
- Since you do not work on your own situation, question or wish, it is important to prepare a short summary in which you describe these two situations (with the experienced tension) and your wish for change as clearly as possible. In the next step of this ROUND 0, you inform the other pairs about these situations; in return you get the prototypes the other pairs make on one of the situations you presented.

5 minutes PRESENTING per pair

- Each pair shares the summaries of the two situations: What is the situation from everyday life you find intriguing, absurd, irritating, unbalanced, strange, funny, ...?. What is the experienced tension? Take the time to describe this, as well as your reaction and the related question or wish with regard to this situation.
- It is important not to start a discussion (this is something the moderator can pay attention to), however the other pairs are given the opportunity to ask questions in order to clarify the situation and the related reaction and question or wish.

## **ROUND 1. AFFIRM** \ 10 minutes MAKING in pairs + 5 minutes PRESENTING per pair

10 minutes MAKING in pairs

- Each pair selects one of the situations that were introduced. What situation or question would you like to work on? The moderator takes care that out of the two situations presented by each pair, one situation is chosen.
- Subsequently you affirm what you have just heard by visualizing this situation using the material that is collected. Try to take out specific elements that really mark or define that situation. What is, according to you both, the essence of this situation? What strikes you especially?
- Affirming means that you stay with the situation – this is not the moment to provide possible solutions.

Note to the moderator:

- As mentioned above, it is important that of the two situations presented by each pair, one situation is chosen so as not to have to prototype in the next round on the own situation or wish.
- Use a timer to indicate the time. We would advise to set the timer at 8 minutes, so that the participants know they have 2 minutes left to finish their prototype.
- 10 minutes is deliberately short, and is meant to make the exercises low-key and accessible for everyone. Experience with artistry or making is not necessary to take part in this workshop.
- In addition, it might be wise to point out to the participants not to get bogged down in an extensive conversation, but to explore what the essence of the situation entails by making together. Remember that “Thinking with your hands” is key in this workshop!

5 minutes PRESENTING per pair

Every pair presents their prototype of the affirmation of the situation. The rest can respond to the prototypes by asking clarifying questions, for example “What is the title of this prototype?” Refrain from offering advice or offering alternative solutions. Also refrain from entering long discussions at this point, but focus on acknowledging what is presented.

**ROUND 2. SUBVERT** 10 minutes MAKING in pairs + 5 minutes PRESENTING per pair

Each pair takes over another pair’s prototype. The moderator can organize switching randomly or each pair can choose based on the affirmative prototype that resonates - this

can be done in silence; no need to say out loud which prototype you will be working on next.

#### 10 minutes MAKING in pairs

- Subvert the affirmation prototype by adjusting it, exaggerating it or repurposing it. Take it apart, add new elements or take out specific elements. Make sure the essential elements of subversive affirmation as discussed in the essay are covered. Once again, no need to discuss this verbally extensively – try to move the discussion and the exploration to the process of making.

#### 5 minutes PRESENTING per pair

- Every pair presents their prototype of the subversion of the situation.
- The rest can respond to the prototypes by asking open questions to clarify the intent with which the subversion was made. Here as well, take care not to fall into the pitfall of offering advice or offering alternative solutions and entering long discussions.

### **ROUND 3. DOCUMENTATION** 15 minutes in pairs

- Come up with titles for the prototypes you just created. And what about your artist/ designer name? Would you like to be referred to as a collective, or do you prefer to use your personal names or remain anonymous?
- Underneath each prototype, the affirmation prototype as well as the subversion prototype, put a paper piece on which the title of the prototype is written, as well as your (artist/ designer) name.
- Subsequently make a picture of each prototype, including the pieces of paper containing the title and your artist/ designer name, and send the pictures to the respective pairs who brought in the experience or the situation. This is your gift to them.
- The pair who brought in the situation, can share the pictures of the documentation. Please add
  - o the introductory text of the situation, the tension experienced and the question it raised.

- the essence of the prototypes according to you – How do you experience both prototypes? What does it bring you? With what insights, thoughts or feelings do you take the affirmative and the subversive prototype with you?
- your artist/designer name since you brought in this situation with which it all started.

## ROUND 4. DISCUSSION & REFLECTION \ 20 minutes

Some questions to guide the discussion and the reflection:

### On the prototypes

- What did you make? How would you describe what you have made?
- What are the reactions from the audience, i.e. the other participants in this workshop? How are the affirmative and the subversive prototypes experienced?
- What is the balance or the tension between exaggerating and still doubting if this could be true or not in the subversive prototypes made within this workshop?
- What other possibilities of subversive affirmation would have been possible?
- Note to the moderator: At the end of this part of the discussion, return to the pairs who introduced the situation or question to reflect on the prototype(s).
  - How do you experience both prototypes?
  - What does it bring you?
  - With what insights, thoughts or feelings do you go home, after this workshop has ended?

### On the process

- How did you experience working on the affirmative prototype in relation to the subversive prototype? What was the difference?
- What were your expectations of prototyping before you started the exercise?
- What did you experience in the process and what did it bring you?
- What was the biggest surprise?
- What would you do differently the next time you do this prototyping exercise?

**On subversive affirmation**

- What did you learn about subversive affirmation?
- What should happen in order to consider subversive affirmation a transformational act?
- How could you potentially incorporate this way of working into your own artistic or educational practice?