



Material Beliefs

Material Beliefs brought together a network of designers, engineers, scientists and social scientists to explore potential implications of emerging biomedical and cybernetic technologies. The ambition was to produce prototypes, exhibitions and debates that would move scientific research out of laboratories into public spaces.

Four designers facilitated the work. They developed relationships with biomedical and cybernetic researchers at UK labs and institutes, guiding a design process in which unfinished scientific research became embodied in speculative products. From the outset there was a commitment to involve others in this process, as it developed, and as much as possible. We invited students and young people into the labs, and took work in progress to museums. Researchers became visiting tutors in design departments, patients became expert advisers to researchers, students challenged complex research, and biomedicine was discussed in galleries.

Accessing biotechnology labs

Material Beliefs provided resources for four interdisciplinary clusters that were each lead by a designer in some form of collaboration with scientists, researchers and technicians based in an academic research facility. The clusters operated in very different ways, and the various collaborative features have been documented elsewhere.

Providing access for others

The object of getting public groups into labs is to bring together experts and non-experts, in order to discuss technology. There is an opportunity for design to identify emerging technology as a malleable and creative material, and to provide a framework that encourages speculation, questioning and discussion.

Developing speculative designs

Issues about technology that emerged during discussion informed the design and development of prototypes. The aim of these designs was to generate alternative products and services. By combining expert and non-expert views, the design embodied a broader range of concerns and attitudes.

Circulating speculative designs

Designs were circulated at public events, including seminars, workshops and exhibitions. For example, an evening event at the Dana Centre in London provided an opportunity for the social implications of technology to be discussed informally, whereas an exhibition in Gijon Spain provided a context where science and society could be considered as a feature of design practice.



Vital Signs uses the mobile phone network to display biometric data.



The Lampshade Robot also traps insects for alternative power.

Material Beliefs was a two-year research project funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).