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Consumer feedback: ethicising with humour in a product review workshop

Timothy Miller

Department of Design, Goldsmiths University of London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

The use of irony and humour to articulate concerns related to the ethics of design is evident in some of the consumer reviews on e-commerce websites including Amazon. Although these reviews have become a viral sensation on the internet, the use of such irony and humour in discussions concerning design ethics is only briefly mentioned in academic design literature. In this article, I reflect on a product review workshop that I hosted at an academic conference in which the participants reviewed a consumer product using a similar form of irony and humour. I conclude by suggesting that the workshop can be understood as methodologically useful to provoke discussions concerning design ethics whilst enabling the study of the use of irony and humour during such discussions in design settings. I also claim that such a workshop encourages the application of an ironic and humorous approach to discussing design ethics beyond design workshops, and the immediate aims and objectives of the workshops irony and humour is explored within.

1. Introduction: doing design ethics in consumer reviews

This article is a reflective analysis of a product review workshop that I hosted at an academic futures conference. The workshop involves the use of irony and humour to explore the doing of design ethics during a hypothetical design review. The workshop, I claim, might be suitable as a methodological approach to discussing design or studying the use of irony and humour during the discussions that take place in the design review meetings in which the quality or appropriateness of design is discussed. When speaking of 'doing design ethics', I understand design as an ethical act; employed with the aim of inscribing certain behaviours and therefore morality into material artefacts. This perspective relates to the work of Latour (1992, 225), one of the proponents of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), the theoretical and methodological approach to understanding the social world as made up of unstable heterogenous arrangements of humans and non-humans. In a seminal ANT text, Latour tells a story whereby, one morning, he 'decides to break a law and start my car without buckling my seatbelt'. Latour then claims that: 'It [the car dashboard] first flashes a red light "FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELT!", then an alarm sounds; it is so high pitched, so

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CONTACT Timothy Miller t.miller@gold.ac.uk

relentless, so repetitive, that I cannot stand it'. Aside from discussing his worsening mood, Latour questions: 'Where is the morality? In me, a human driver, dominated by the mindless power of an artifact? Or in the artifact forcing me, a mindless human, to obey the law . . . ?'. Latour concludes that, if there were no way for him to disable the alarm, 'I, plus the car, plus the dozens of patented engineers, plus the police are making me be moral'. In this case, Latour (1992, 232–233) claims that 'no human is as relentlessly moral as a machine' and that people 'delegate to nonhumans not only force . . . but also values, duties, and ethics. It is because of this morality that we, humans, behave so ethically'.

Latour's trajectory of thought is explored by Tonkinwise (2004, 134), a frequent discussant of the relevance of Latour's thinking for the discipline of design. In his discussion of the doing of ethics by design, Tonkinwise discusses how, 'To access the ethics of design, Latour works backwards, starting from things that are unethical, or at least impolite'. To explain this, Tonkinwise considers one of Latour's 'rude' things: A door that will not shut and the design of a door-closing spring, which Latour discusses alongside the car example mentioned above. Tonkinwise suggests that Latour 'finds an example of a door that rudely will not shut itself after we have moved through, inconveniently remaining open'. Tonkinwise also considers how the building that the door that does not close is attached to is usually opened and closed by a doorman. In this case, Tonkinwise elaborates on the morality of such a situation, where 'the value of a door returning to its shut position plus the value of the time and effort of the person passing through the door exceeds the value of the doorman' which 'is in no way ethical'. Moreover, Tonkinwise, following Latour, discusses a situation in which the doorman that typically opens and closes the door is striking, leading the organisation who owns the building to replace the doorman with a door spring. Tonkinwise goes on to describe the spring as potentially working to shut the door too quickly meaning that people carrying bulky items experience difficulties interacting with it. He also discusses how elderly people may find the spring too strong, meaning that they cannot open the door. The spring is, for Tonkinwise, a 'rude' doorman, 'selecting who get to proceed through, and at what rate, and outrightly discriminating against many types of people'.

Tonkinwise's discussion of Latour's story indicates that there are different perspectives that can be brought to bear on design, and which illuminate the ethos of it. If, as Latour and Tonkinwise claim, ethics is done by way of design, the doing of design ethics can be considered as occurring in the discussions that 'review' the 'rude' qualities of designed artefacts. A perspective on how this plays out during design review meetings is evident in Lloyd's (2009, 165) study of how engineering designers review the design of a digital pen. Lloyd notices that the engineers imagined the extreme consequences of their designs, which apparently 'allows them – even forces them – to think in ways which we might consider unethical'. Furthermore, Lloyd speaks of how one of the engineers speculates on how the heated tip of the pen might mean that, in the instance of children playing with it in a car, 'you'd get lots of burn holes in your car seats'. Another engineer then responds by claiming that 'if you were a school thug you could pin people to the ground'. In his analysis, Lloyd (2009, 167) mentions that humour often arises in such discussions, 'when the imagination had led to strange or unexpected consequences' and suggests 'there is a link here between negotiating ethical subjects and the use of humour' and the use of humour to 'avoid talking explicitly about ethical consequences'.

Arguably, similar forms of humour appear in some of the reviews that consumers use to feedback on the products they purchase from e-commerce websites such as Amazon. An interesting example of this are the reviews written for Bic's Crystal 'For Her' Slim Ballpoint Pens; ballpoint pens designed for 'females'. Since being written, these reviews have become a viral sensation on the internet, as mentioned in the special section dedicated to them on the Crystal (2022) Wikipedia page. As shown in Figure 1, Amazon reviewer A Keen Skier awarded the pens five stars: 'My husband never allowed me to write' but 'Once I had learnt to write' they were able to 'vent thoughts about recipe ideas, sewing and gardening' even though their husband was 'less pleased' as the pens encouraged 'more independence'. This example can be understood by way of how Tonkinwise discusses how Latour considers the 'rude' aspects of such objects, which provides access to different perspectives on the ethics of design. In this case, the reviews of the Bic 'For Her' pen set can be understood as an example of the ironic humour that Lloyd discusses as used in design settings to articulate concerns related to the ethics of design. For me, this approach appears useful for the situations in which the negotiation of design ethics occurs, such as design review meetings. In the next sections, I contextualise the form of humour discussed by Lloyd in relation to conceptions of irony and humour in the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK). I then explore a consumer product review

Figure 1. An amazon review of a set of Bic's crystal 'For Her' medium ballpoint pens.

workshop that employed a similar form of irony and humour to provoke discussions concerning the ethics of the Bic 'For Her' pens.

2. Context: understanding irony and humour in consumer reviews

The ironic Amazon review of Bic's 'For Her' pens and Lloyd's discussion of humour in design review meetings can be understood by way of the irony and humour present in SSK, an approach to the study of the social conditions of scientific knowledge production. For example, Woolgar (1983, 241–242) discusses the ironic nature of constructivist social studies of science, in which such scholars claim that natural scientist's accounts of reality are socially constructed but without considering that their works are similar. In advancing the potential of adopting such an ironic position, Woolgar (1983, 258) first considers the idea of *instrumental irony*, where 'alternative accounts [of social reality] are contrasted but where the business of accounting and contrasting is passed over'. What this means is that, to Woolgar, instrumental irony is employed when discussing various contrasting accounts of the social world in which 'the reader is asked not to undermine the sociologist's irony'. Departing from this position, Woolgar (1983, 260) considers the value of 'irony as a *project*' by developing an understanding of the notion of *dynamic irony*, which offers 'an awareness as in they [people] move from failing to realize the irony to seeing its possibility'. In Woolgar's case, this is achieved by adopting a reflexive position as an SSK scholar, by 'asking the reader to constantly recognize the fragility of the ironists [the SSK scholar's] own account'. Woolgar (1983, 261) goes on to claim that in the social study of science this is useful, as a reader of a text is 'encouraged actively to undermine the preferred interpretation' which 'highlights the infinite interpretative possibilities of the text'.

Woolgar's idea of irony as a project can therefore be understood as the evidencing of a scholar's own ironic position in their written accounts of the social world, as a type of in-joke that invites readers to similarly engage in adopting such an ironic position. Similar forms of irony can be found in the scientific laboratories that SSK scholars often study. Gilbert and Mulkay (1984, 176–177) discuss a piece of paper pinned to the wall of a biochemistry laboratory which contains two lists of phrases, one being titled 'What he wrote' and which contained phrases scientists use including: 'It has been long known that … '. The second list, 'What he meant', displayed what the first phrase apparently meant: 'I haven't bothered to look up the reference'. In this case, the lists can be considered as revealing an irony related to the scientist's accounts of reality. An example of this in SSK is Mulkay's (1985, 2–3) introduction to a publication concerning an analysis of a scientific debate had by way of letters, in the introduction to which the book speaks as a character who explains the format and writing style of it. Another example is Woolgar and Ashmore's (1988, 10–11) introduction to an edited publication that discusses reflexivity in SSK. The analysis builds on Woolgar's claims, above, in which the authors discuss how to account for the idea that their social accounts of science are socially constructed. To do this, Woolgar and Ashmore employ several fictional dialogues presenting a variety of perspectives on the subject and which evidences the constructed nature of their text.

Gilbert and Mulkay's discussion of scientists' irony can be likened to Mulkay's and Woolgar and Ashmore's as neither assume that the scientists or sociologists of science that might come across the lists or the book introductions will understand them as ironic. Woolgar's dynamic ironic project, therefore, speaks to Mulkay's (1988, 3–4) idea that the

humour that might arise from such irony 'depends on the active creation and display of interpretative multiplicity'. These moments pertain to the conflation of the serious and the comic, they hold multiple possible meanings and can be understood as an 'interpretive test' (1988, 17). The examples that Gilbert and Mulkay as well as Mulkay and Woolgar and Ashmore discuss can be interpreted similarly, as a test holding potential to reveal people's understanding of an irony they might express through humour. Moreover, these examples can be understood as what Mulkay (1988, 26) calls 'bisociation', where humour is an upshot of a 'sudden movement between, or unexpected combination of, distinctive interpretive frames'. This 'interpretative duality' (1988, 29–30) reveals whether an interpreter 'gets' a presented irony, as revealed through expressions of humour. This approach is perhaps most visible in Ashmore's (1989, 1) introduction to his publication on reflexivity in SSK, which takes the form of a lecture in which an awkward question is responded to by an audience of well-known SSK scholars, each of whom provide a different perspective on the concerns of the field of SSK (1989, 16). Ashmore's use of humour therefore follows Mulkay's idea of humour which connects to Woolgar's (1998, 446) comment that ironic jokes are often used by 'members of social networks' to 'remind each other of . . . what counts as appropriate'.

This understanding of irony and humour is, however, different from philosopher of science Stengers (2000, 66.6) discussion of Woolgar's notion of irony. This is because Stengers considers the humourist as recognising themselves 'as a product of the history whose construction one is trying to follow'. Woolgar's position in considering the ironist as recognising that they are embroiled in an ironic position therefore also differs from Vann's (2010, 98) discussion, in which she draws on Stengers' work to propose the 'merging' of irony and humour. A clear example of the ironic humour discussed by Woolgar is explored by Ziewitz (2019, 722) by way of an ironic joke made by a panel moderator during a conference panel session concerning the use of social media in search engine optimisation (SEO) settings: 'I get spammed 50 times a day on Twitter. Seriously, I get spammed on Facebook, I get spammed on –', before laughter erupted in the audience. In this case, the moderator comments on the nuisance spam emails create even though they, and the people they address, employ such emails in their SEO work. Like Lloyd's discussion of design ethics, Ziewitz interprets this as 'ethicising', where an ironic in-joke articulates ethical quandaries concerning the work they are engaged in producing. In the next sections, I report on a consumer product review workshop which explored how this type of irony and humour might be employed to provoke discussions related to the ethics of the Bic 'For Her' pen set in a design-related conference setting. In sum, the workshop can be understood as what Woolgar refers to as irony as a project, in which the participants employ irony and humour to reveal some of the interpretive possibilities of the Bic 'For Her' pen set.

3. Methodology: exploring irony and humour in a product review workshop

During 2022 I hosted a product review workshop which I initially called *User Feedback* at a futures conference hosted at Arizona State University (ASU) in Tempe, Arizona, USA. The conference was attended by academic scholars and other professionals interested in the potential of the idea of futures in design, business, and government. The workshop took place in ASU's Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory contained within the

Walton Centre for Planetary Health. The neutrally decorated glass-fronted seminar room I was allocated for the workshop was dominated by a large rectilinear timber-laminated table that encouraged discussion mediated by a projection screen. Upon entering the room, I was met with two conference mediators, one of whom offered to help with the projection screen, both of whom participated in the workshop. As I made small talk with them, I moved to the end of the table and sat on one of the back-supporting office chairs arranged around it, whilst connecting my laptop to the presentation screen using the screen-share function of the video conferencing software Zoom. I then arranged the worksheets and participant informed consent forms at the front of the room, the latter outlining that the workshop was a part of my ongoing research into the use of humour in design reviews, and that the workshop was to be audio recorded and later written about.

The workshop drew inspiration from the previously discussed ironic Amazon review and was designed to provoke discussions concerning what Tonkinwise refers to as the 'rude' qualities of design. Through this, I explored the validity of the use of the type of irony and humour that Lloyd discusses as aiding the articulation of design ethics in design reviews. To achieve this, the workshop involved the participants reviewing the Bic 'For Her' pen set using the form of irony and humour that Woolgar discusses in SSK, to bring to light multiple interpretative possibilities associated with the ethics of the pen set. To support the workshop, I produced a presentation, shown in Figure 2, that introduced the workshop as a service that offered the participants an opportunity to explore an experimental approach to reviewing design using irony and humour. This was supported by the two worksheets, shown in Figure 3, and a postcard image of the Bic 'For Her' pens, shown in Figure 4. I also supplied a set of the Bic 'For Her' pens that I purchased from the auction website eBay. In the workshop, the worksheets were used to guide the two-phase
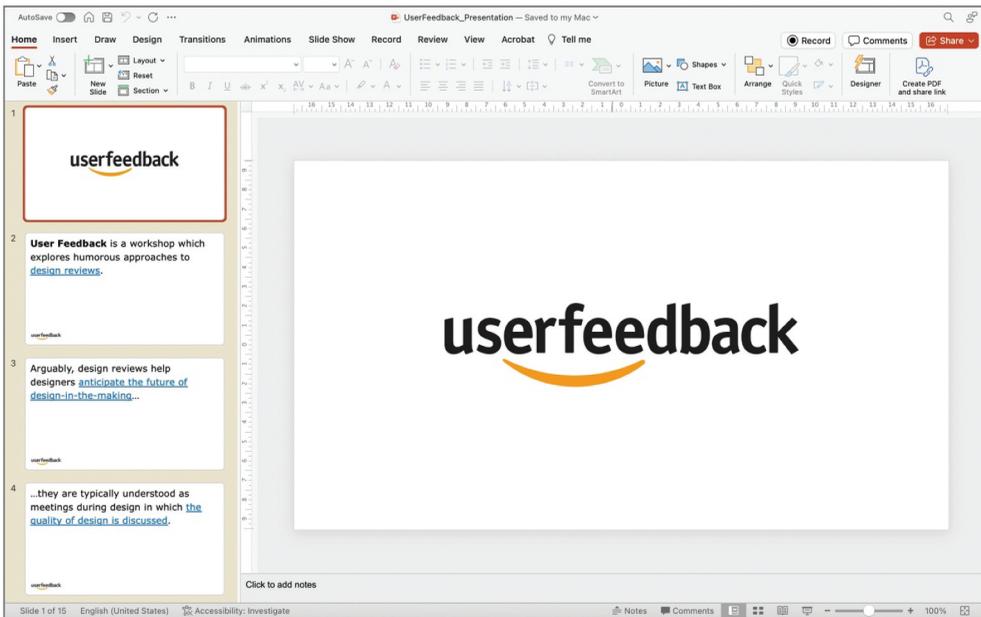

Figure 2. The introductory PowerPoint presentation used during the workshop.

Figure 3. The worksheets supplied during the first and second phases of the workshop.

activity, the first of which contained an instruction: 'Use 150–200 words to write a review of Bic's "Pen for Her" in relation to your profession or discipline'. This stage was set up to understand how the participants might typically 'review' the pens from their professional or disciplinary standpoints and which were thereafter read aloud and discussed by the participants. The second worksheet asked the participants to: 'Re-write your review in a humorous way in relation to your gender, race, class or other facet of your identity'.

What I did not anticipate when I conceived of the idea of the workshop was that whilst hosting it, I would feel a rising sense of disconcertment, as I did not know how the participants might react to the subject of it. However, these feelings became a reference point for the observations that I made during the workshop, which I revisited after with reference to the audio recording. What this means is that to achieve a simultaneity of hosting and observing the workshop, I took inspiration from Verran's (2023, 44) discussion of the use of disconcertment as an ethnographic field device. According to Verran, to feel disconcerted means to 'feel put-out, to experience a feeling of not being quite up with, and certainly not on top of, what is happening around you'.

Verran (2023, 50) mentions how paying attention to such feelings might be useful for researchers to make observations and create stories that reveal 'some insides of the happening' of the research being undertaken. The following report on the workshop is structured by way of three moments of disconcertment that I felt when: I asked the participants to read their ironic and humorous contributions aloud; the workshop was derailed from discussions of the pen set to include other gendered designs; the irony and humour explored in the workshop was activated during another conference presentation, after the workshop. However, it must also be noted that disconcertment was seemingly

Figure 4. A postcard image of the Bic 'For Her' pen set used during the workshop.

also experienced by the participants. This was evident in the workshop by their informing each other that their humorous reviews should be understood as such, which maintained everyone's understanding of them as produced for the purposes of the workshop.

4. From irony to humour in a product review workshop

As the workshop commenced, I greeted the participants from Brazil, England, India, Italy, Norway, The Netherlands, and the USA. After the introductory presentation, when I requested that the participants read their reviews aloud, I first experienced what Verran refers to as disconcertment. In this sense, I dreaded what the participants might say in jest, whilst being aware that I was using an object that was stereotypically gendered 'for her' whilst presenting as a white middle-class male design researcher from England. Similarly, the participants also seemed to express such feelings when they engaged with the activity, by foregrounding their contributions with explanations that they were ironic. With this, they ensured that their contributions constituted what Woolgar refers to as a form of *shared* 'dynamic irony'. This helped mediate discussions in which the interpretive possibilities concerning the ethics of the pens were revealed, alongside various examples of the use of humour that Lloyd notes often occur during such discussions. This began with a female innovation researcher who claimed that she enjoyed 'having a choice of colours to choose from' but 'the [pen's] thinner barrel actually makes it harder to write with, maybe my hands are not dainty enough for female standards'. She concluded by suggesting that some padding might help the pens be more comfortable to use. Although launching into her first contribution directly, she started her second with an explanation:

'I'm starting this from the point of view of being Indian, and that we really like things that are cheap and get the job done'. Many of the participants laughed before the innovation researcher went on to say that "this set of twenty pens is a great value deal when you buy it on sale, they do 'get the job done' and that she was glad that they found them discounted in price. She then emphasised: 'The sale is really important, remember?'. After the participants giggled, she concluded that the 'use value' of the pens might be extended 'as [drinking] straws when all of the ink is used up'.

Another participant, a male government researcher, similarly started their first contribution by explaining 'I'm a civil servant, and we just love meetings'. He then claimed that he was currently introducing some 'modern methods in recent business meetings' that used coloured post-it notes and the Bic 'For Her' pens. He claimed that the colour of the pens worked well with physician and psychologist Edward de Bono's 'coloured hats' approach to focusing meeting conversations. At the end of his first presentation, he introduced an element of humour: 'wasn't too sure about the packaging mind you, so I tend to take them out of the box before my male colleagues turn up'. Unlike his first review, the second involved a preamble: 'I'll share mine, it's rather painful actually, I don't know if it's humorous or not, so treat me gently. Here we go ... '. During this contribution he emphasised the ironic qualities of his first presentation. 'Since we introduced these girly pink pens at work', he said, 'I've been really impressed with how some of my female colleagues have really got stuck into contributing to our business meetings'. As the other workshop participants laughed, he mentioned that 'in the past they [their female colleagues] wouldn't say too much' but the pens 'designed for the ladies' were a great opportunity to increase participation and 'some of their ideas have been really good, too'. He concluded by saying 'smiley face', to indicate that what they were saying was not representative of his personal point of view but should be understood as ironic.

Much like the examples above, a female STS researcher volunteered to share her second contribution by saying: 'Please don't read this as a cry for help' but after recently thinking about their gender identification, they realised that they 'reluctantly identify as female, so I've written it from this perspective'. She then reviewed the pens: 'At first I was struck by how they look like a pregnancy test' due to the graphic design style depicting 'peaks and waves' which might mean that 'you might accidentally pick up a pen [instead of a pregnancy test]'. She then claimed that 'as I was writing this, I realised that Bic has re-gendered writing potentially, and maybe I should be thankful that I now have a product that ensures and grants me access to the act of writing because historically that might not have been the case'. She then claimed that they now 'don't have to write in a pseudonym, a male pseudonym or initialled name anymore, when I am publishing work. Thanks to Bic I can write in my own female name and in my own hand' and 'I don't think that this is the first time that writing has been gendered. It was probably a male thing, to be given access to learn to manipulate a pen, and perhaps we have forgotten that ... and maybe they're granting me access [to writing]'. There was a lot less laughter in the room after this ironic positive review, during which time the participants discussed whether the pens could be understood as empowering, or whether they are diminutive and reductive, as one participant suggested.

Many other participants also foregrounded their ironic contributions. One of the female conference hosts said: 'I'm a geoscientist and I study the ocean, so, I'm not sure I'll contribute much to the topic'. She then described a research trip, and that the colour of the pens meant that 'none of the [male] coast guards liked them and so no one wanted to

steal them'. A male architect started by saying: 'so, um, when I started my PhD, I was told that . . . no-one wanted to listen to a straight, heteronormative male. But anyways, that was my whole meaning with this, but a bit of humour, if you'll allow me'. He then reviewed the pens by saying 'as a straight male architect I normally have a top-down heteronormative relationship to my drawing instruments' and how the Bic 'For Her' pens have transformed the 'powerful straight male lines' they draw into 'uncontrollable, devious curves'. After this, a female industrial designer said: 'OK, I'll share mine, now, it's supposed to be funny'. She then referred to the smaller size of the Bic 'For Her' pen barrel by saying: 'Do you think my professor will accept constant hand cramping as a valid excuse to hand in my term paper late?'. What therefore became apparent is that the participants chose to foreground their ironic contributions with explanations that they were ironic. In doing so, they indicated to their conference colleagues that their ironic contributions should be taken with humour, and, with this, they turned the workshop into an in-joke. Due to this, the workshop was successful in making visible various examples of the irony and humour that Lloyd discusses as employed in design settings to raise concerns related to the ethics of design. The workshop therefore enables the further study of the use of humour in such situations, whilst offering a workshop format through which such an exploration might be achieved.

5. From humour to ethicising in a product review workshop

Alongside the participant's contributions, the irony and humour employed in the workshop successfully provoked what Tokinwise considers as discussions concerning the 'rude' qualities of design. This also occurred beyond the focus of the workshop on the Bic pens, as well as giving rise to related discussions after the workshop. This means that my understanding of the methodological attributes of the workshop shifted from that of an approach to design and design research, to a form of self-exploration and self-invention. This began during phase one, where a female critical designer interjected, and discussed how the Bic 'For Her' pen set reminded them that when driving cars 'I always have to shift, in advance, my seat, and I have a lot of blank points [blind spots]'. In response, a female futures researcher raised that the safety features of cars 'are designed for men, or a 180-to-200-pound man' and 'I wonder if the car shifted aesthetically to be more for women, I wonder if they . . . make adjustments to the safety features. But probably not!'. The government researcher replied by adding that they had recently learnt that 'crash test dummies are not usually designed using the female form and they've only recently started doing that now which is staggering . . . '. As I became concerned about these off-topic conversations, due to the workshop time limit, I attempted to re-direct the conversation back to the Bic 'For Her' pen set. I did so by claiming that the car example reminded me of a car designed in the 1950s by the American car manufacturer Dodge, a pink coloured car named *La Femme* released with a matching pink purse. As I discussed how it was interesting that many, if not all designs have gendered assumptions built into them, the futures researcher raised a separate concern, that 'in men's pants, the number means something, you know, the numbers of centimetres or inches of the waist, whereas a women's size 4 or 6 . . . is not useful for anything'. After this, 'vanity sizing' was raised, and whether this implied that females were vainer than males.

Phase two of the workshop was also derailed similarly. However, this time, the participants discussions turned to the workshop, and the type of ironic humour employed within it. This began when a female foresight researcher said: 'I have a hard time to use humour, because . . . when it hurts us in some way, you know, it takes a lot of, like, intelligence to turn this angriness into humour'. She then went on to point to another of the participants and said 'when I listened to what you had written and when I see what I wrote I thought: Wow! I was angry! I was not able to put, you know, I was more cynical'. A female systems analyst then suggested 'I felt the same way, and so I intentionally broke myself out of it by telling myself I love this pen because I was fighting that same thing'. The foresight researcher, in response, said: 'I couldn't! I just wanted to smash it [the pen]; you know?'. As she was exclaiming, she raised her clenched fist at the elbow and motioned it downwards, as if she was about to hit the table they were sat at. After this, she read her contribution out loud and, like many of the examples discussed in the last section, started by saying: 'Don't judge me for this, please', after which the other participants laughed before she suggested that the pens 'minimise the complexity of being female'. At this stage, I felt a certain tension rise in the workshop, along with my feelings of disconcertment. Unlike my prior attempt to keep the workshop focused on the Bic pens, I felt that it was best to avoid interrupting the participants contributions in place of my own agenda for the workshop.

Towards the end of the workshop, the conversations continued in a similar fashion, during which time I noticed that they reflected my own concern at the beginning of the workshop as to whether the participants would understand the ironic humour presented. In discussion, the foresight researcher suggested that 'there's a sophisticated way to understand this humour and to re-interpret humour as humour and not to take it literally'. She then said: 'Maybe this is minimising or underestimating [people's] intelligence?' The futures researcher then added that 'humour is a way of taking pretty serious concepts and making them more inclusive'. She also claimed that 'it was fascinating that this has a dozen of us, really, thinking on a deep level about gender biases . . . and, you know, we've had some really pretty deep conversations over the last hour'. The STS researcher, however, said: 'I could imagine a feminist not finding this funny at all', which led me to question the ethics of the workshop, and that the ironic approach explored within it might not be appreciated by everyone. This was further emphasised when the systems analyst questioned the view of someone 'male presenting'. In earnest, they questioned: 'Are they more or less likely to see it as a joke, or not?'. She also said: 'I'm sure that I could find some people, you know, back in my home state . . . who would . . . not even get it at all and would be, like: Yeah, I'm gonna buy my wife those pens!'. After this, the government researcher, and the architect, both clarified that they assumed that the pens were ironic all along. 'What annoys me the most', the systems analyst said, 'is that they're just blue pens!', before the foresight researcher claimed to be frustrated because 'it reminds me of when I was a kid, when I wanted pink, blue pens!'.

The least expected outcome of the workshop was that the ironic humour employed in the workshop was activated at the conference after the workshop. This occurred during a keynote plenary presentation hosted by a representative of a government-related organisation, which reflects Ziewitz' discussion of an ironic comment made about SEO work at an SEO conference. In the presentation, the presenter discussed that the situations in which futures are imagined in organisations might be diversified. During the audience questions, the government researcher asked the presenter how they might advise a 'pale and stale' male government researcher, such as themselves, how they

might diversify their workplace. During this time, I felt a heightened sense of disconcertment, as the consequences of the workshop seemed greater than I had anticipated. After some smirking in the audience, the presenter claimed that it would be inappropriate for them to suggest how the government researcher should diversify their workplace. I later asked the government researcher if they were applying the type of irony and humour encouraged in the workshop, which they suggested they were. The success of the workshop is therefore the way that the irony and humour within it generated discussions that went beyond the Bic 'For Her' pens to include a wider discussion concerning design ethics. And that the workshop offers a playful, if not contentious way to instigate discussions concerning the rude qualities of design that Tonkinwise speaks of, which may otherwise be difficult to broach.

6. Conclusion: ethicising in a product review workshop, and beyond

This article can be considered as providing a series of insights relevant to design ethics, as it discusses a methodological approach to mediating discussions in which ethicising occurs. This approach draws on Tonkinwise's discussion of the way that Latour accesses the ethics of designed artefacts by exploring their rude qualities, which indicates that such discussions are useful for bringing to light different perspectives on the ethical qualities of them. This approach was inspired by the idea that such discussions are often broached in ironic and humorous ways, as evident in the Amazon reviews of the Bic 'For Her' pen set and in Lloyd's analysis of the ironic design review discussions concerning the design of a digital pen. By understanding this type of humour in relation to Woolgar's interpretation of the notion dynamic irony in SSK, the workshop was formulated to highlight the various interpretative possibilities concerning the ethics of the Bic 'For Her' pen set. The use of irony and humour in the workshop was prevalent, and some of the participants claimed that the workshop helped them discuss their concerns in a productive manner. Due to this, the workshop can be considered as a useful approach to activating discussions concerning design ethics including, perhaps, in the design review meetings in which the ethics of design is often negotiated. Due to this, the workshop can be seen to provide a format through which it is possible to make visible and investigate the use of irony and humour that Lloyd notes is often employed to address the ethics of design in design meetings.

The workshop can also be seen to encourage the use of irony and humour beyond situations such as workshops or design reviews. This is because the irony and humour that was encouraged was activated during one of the conference plenary presentations. This means that the workshop must be considered as enabling a form of self-exploration and self-invention through which the participants' design reviewing work practices might be transformed. In this way, the participants were exposed to a specific use of irony and humour to broach perhaps otherwise-difficult-to-have discussions concerning what Tonkinwise calls the rude qualities of design. As a result, the workshop can be seen as encouraging the participants to engage in broaching similar discussions in relation to concerns that are not addressed in such workshops. However, the use of the irony and humour during the conference plenary presentation reminded me that the workshop was designed to imply that the only appropriate position one might take in relation to the ethics of design is to provoke the doing of design ethics using irony and humour. Otherwise, the solutions that such workshops might give rise to run the risk of producing new ethical concerns and

perpetuate the very concern that such workshops set out to explore. The disconcertment that I felt during the conference plenary presentation was therefore a reminder that similar ironic and humorous design ethics workshops should be hosted with care. As there is no saying when, where, and how and to what extent the learnings from them may be employed, nor how such irony and humour might affect the people involved in such discussions.

Disclosure Statement

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ORCID

Timothy Miller http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9396-7792

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