

Pressure-Cooker Political Critique

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Five steps for a quick political critique of a design artifact. The schema is flexible and can be adapted on a case-by-case basis, allowing you to tailor your critique to the specific artifact and context.

1. CURIOSITY: Begin by exploring what piques your interest and sparks curiosity. It could be something that immediately catches your eye, or perhaps something that triggers an emotional response.

Some questions that could get you started are:

- What intrigues you about this artifact's design?
- This makes me angry / curious / perplexed / worried...?
- I feel that I disagree with...

2. CONTEXT: Consider the artifact's physical and socio-cultural surroundings. Look beyond the artifact itself and examine its broader context.

Some questions to get started:

- Where is the artifact situated? What is its physical location?
- How does it interact with other objects, systems, or people?
- Are you aware of discussions or debates surrounding it?
- Is there someone who can't use this artifact? Why?

3. VALUES AND CONFLICT: Dive into the values that underpin the design artifact and identify any conflicting perspectives.

Explore values and conflicts with questions like:

- What principles does the artifact champion? What beliefs or ideals does it embody?
- Which values are at odds with the artifact? Are there conflicting viewpoints?

4. FORM: Analyze how the design artifact expresses a certain worldview through its form, function, and various characteristics. Sometimes this expression is explicit, while other times it may be more nuanced and implicit.

Consider the artifact's aesthetic qualities:

- How does the artifact's design express its underlying values?
- What messages or intentions are conveyed through its form?

5. THE BIG PICTURE: Step back and reflect on the broader implications of your observations. Consider the social, cultural, and political dimensions of the artifact and contemplate potential actions or changes.

Think about:

- What connections arise from your critique? How does it relate to larger issues?
- In what ways can the artifact be improved or redesigned?
- How can we bring about change based on our critique?