

Rethinking Affordance, special issue: Media Theory (Stuttgart, 8–9 Jun 18)

Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart

Deadline: Jan 29, 2018

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Responding to the continued and accelerating rise of algorithmic culture, this journal special issue and corresponding symposium will explore critical intersections between creative practice and recent efforts to re-imagine the concept of 'affordance' for the digital.

Theoretical considerations of 'affordance' originate at the intersection of perceptual and cognitive psychology, specifically within the context of J.J. Gibson's work from the mid-60s onwards. According to Gibson, 'affordance' sought to account for the actionable properties of a physical object or environment. An object's affordances, in other words, describe its phenomenological qualities, projecting potential uses, delimiting possible actions, and signaling perceived functions. While discontinuities between established discourses on 'affordance' and its contemporary deployment have been widely identified and problematized (e.g., Evans et. al. 2017; Davis & Chouinard 2017; Samson & Soon 2015; Nagy & Neff 2015), the theoretical parameters of specifically digital affordances remain under-examined. As a result, despite its frequent application within the domains of, for example, HCI, media studies and contemporary design, 'affordance' continues to operate within a conceptual framework that largely ignores the specific grounds of contemporary computation, resting instead on the physicality, phenomenological accessibility, and perceived liveliness of objects (e.g., Wells 2002; Morineau et. al. 2009). Importantly, each of these defining characteristics are fundamentally incompatible with what are increasingly referred to as the processual, 'deep,' and unperceivable realities of algorithmic systems (Lovink 2014; Parisi 2013; Zielinski 2009). Deploying the concept of affordance without a reexamination of its digital specificity (for example when it comes to interaction design, user experience design, or software development) ultimately means to foreclose opportunities for generative critique, limiting the potential for creative, alternative, subversive, and radically different uses of digital artefacts and processes.

In an effort to delineate and address gaps in contemporary criticism, our aim is to re-examine and correspondingly re-theorize the concept of 'affordance.' Because 'affordance' is often positioned at intersections of design and implementation, we are particularly interested in approaches that bridge or combine theoretical and practice-based concerns. As the history of art reveals, artists' and designers' access to emerging digital technologies has always informed their scientific, industrial, commercial and rhetorical development (Patterson 2015; Kane 2014).

We therefore invite both media theorists and media practitioners (artists, designers, curators, etc.) to join us in exploring the critical historical and contemporary valences of 'affordance,' by proposing and submitting essays, artist position statements, and symposium presentations that engage

with the following intersecting areas of inquiry:

- Examinations of the historical and contemporary roles artists have played in shaping and delimiting the affordances of emerging digital technologies;
- Theorizations of the contemporary realization of 'affordance' across and within digital and algorithmic contexts; and
- Analyses of how creative practice can inform a critical rethinking of existing philosophies of affordance.

Interested parties are encouraged to send a 300-word abstract to rethinking.affordance@gmail.com by January 29th, 2018. Authors will be notified of acceptance in early February.

The Rethinking Affordance symposium is scheduled to take place at Akademie Schloss Solitude from June 8th – 9th (<http://www.akademie-solitude.de>). The symposium will serve both as a presentation and workshopping platform. It is scheduled to take place in conjunction with a thematically aligned exhibition and web-residency. Participants will be provided with accommodations for the duration of the symposium. Small travel bursaries intended to partially subsidize participation may also be available.

Symposium presenters will be invited to submit their longer research essays (6,000-8,000 words inclusive of notes and references) and/or shorter critical position statements for peer-reviewed inclusion in a corresponding special issue of the journal Media Theory (<http://mediatheoryjournal.org/>).

Full papers for peer-review will be due July 15, 2018 with a projected publication date of early 2019.

The submission guidelines can be found here: <http://mediatheoryjournal.org/editorial-policies/journal-submission-guidelines/>

Reference:

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