

Critical By Design? (Basel, 17–18 May 18)

Basel, FHNW Academy of Art and Design, Freilager-Platz 1, 4142 Münchenstein b.

Basel, May 17–18, 2018

Registration deadline: May 3, 2018

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Critical By Design? Potentials and Limitations of Materialized Critique

International research conference on the capacity of design as a mode of critique

The conference 'Critical by Design?' offers a unique platform for the interdisciplinary discussion of critical theories and practices from a design perspective. Renowned experts from design theory, history and practice, the philosophy of technology, the art, cultural and media studies as well as the field of human-computer interaction come together to reconsider historical trajectories, advance contemporary understandings and propose future developments of design as a materialized form of critique.

The relationship between design and critique proves to be ambiguous and problematic. In its interventionist and constructive nature, design meets criticality on the premise of the shapeability and alterability of cultural practices and social realities. Design can be seen as inherently critical and speculative, as it sets out to project novel relationships of people and things from that which it diagnoses as the status quo. At the same time, design is inevitably normative, if not often violent, as it partakes in stabilizing the past, normalizing the present condition and obstructing possible futures. In the same way as design can unfold and make experienceable social boundaries, values and norms embedded in our material culture, it is a major contributor to their manifestation and obscuration in the first place. The conference aims to foster a vital rethinking of critical design strategies by reconsidering their effectiveness and exposing their inherent limitations.

With the emergence of approaches such as Design for Debate, Critical and Speculative Design or Critical Making, among many others, the idea that design could be a material mode of critical inquiry regained an international and interdisciplinary visibility in the last decades. By now, a plethora of labels, schools and frameworks has established that aim to reclaim design as a critical practice. The specific conditions and boundaries of design as a mode of critical engagement and the various notions of criticality employed often remain implicit. Conceptual references to earlier radical and anti-design traditions or historic traditions of social critique have hardly been analyzed in greater depth so far. Furthermore, contemporary critical fields like feminist or post-colonial theories have only been addressed recently and by a small number of design theorists and practitioners. The conference therefore provides a platform to discuss the genealogies of criticality in design, to elaborate the specific capabilities and pitfalls of design-based critique and to infer implications for the further development of the field.

Additionally, the conference picks up on the recent efforts within the humanities to question and update the general foundations of critical epistemologies in the wake of technological and socio-political shifts. Critique, seen as a resistant mode of thinking and acting, has to undergo the program of critical questioning itself. The struggle with critique observed in fields such as the social, cultural, art and media studies has yet to feed back into design and design research in a similar manner. The interdisciplinary context of the symposium offers a chance to exchange and co-develop emerging forms of criticality across fields and practices.

The following questions will serve as conceptual starting points:

- Which concepts of criticality from other disciplines and traditions of thought are adapted in the discourses and practices of design? What, on the other hand, are distinctively designerly concepts of critique and how could these resonate with the methodologies and epistemologies of other disciplines?
- If critique through artifacts has to be seen as a special mode of critical engagement, how can it be specified and described? How do the specifics of design – be it the materiality of artifacts, the propositional, speculative and normative nature of design, aspects of use, misuse and appropriation or the shaping of behaviours, experiences and habits through design – allow for distinctive forms of critique? What then, are promising and effective critical design tactics that are appropriate for the contemporary condition?
- What are inherent blind spots of design that might limit and call into question its potential for critique? How can design be critical of the politics of the already-designed and the trivialization of societal issues as design problems? How can the rhetoric valorization of criticality as a cultural currency be problematized in critical design practices? And how to foster honest practices, that take on responsibilities for the issues they aim to debate and critique?

More information and registration at: www.criticalbydesign.ch

PROGRAM

Thursday, 17 May 2018

9.00

Registration and Coffee

9.30

Welcome and Introduction

10.00–13.00

Panel 1: Ways of Framing the Criticality of Design

Jeffrey Bardzell:

What Rhymes With Critical Design?

Matt Ward:

The Life and Death of Critical and Speculative Design: Post-Truth, Post-Capital and Post-Disciplinarity in Perilous Times

Ludwig Zeller:

Towards Uncharted Waters. In Search of a Self-critical, Meta-ethical and Epistemological Form of Design Research

13.00

Lunch Break

14.00–16.00

Panel 2: Contesting Contemporary Narratives

Alice Twemlow:

Trawling the Trash: Design's Critical Engagements with Waste

Shaowen Bardzell:

Seeing Like a Hymen: A Feminist Perspective on Design, Criticality, and Enacting Futures Panel

16.00

Coffee Break

16.30–18.30

Panel 3: Critical Interfaces

Søren Bro Pold:

Interface Criticism by Design

Moritz Greiner-Petter:

Tacit Formalisation

18.30

Apéro

Friday, 18 May 2018

9.00

Coffee

9.30–12.30

Panel 4: Critical Making and Public Design

Janneke Wesseling:

The Device Paradigm and Contemporary Practices in Art and Design

Anja Groten:

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Carl DiSalvo:

Staging Public Experiments in Civics: Designing towards New Forms of Togetherness

12.30

Lunch Break

13.30–15.30

Panel 5: Dialectics of Material Epistemologies and Discourses

Igor Galligo:

For a Sublimatory Dialectic of Critical Design

Peter-Paul Verbeek:

What is Material Enlightenment? On Metamodernity and Metamediation

15.30

Coffee Break

16.00–18.00

Panel 6: The Paradoxes of Designing (for) the Future

Bruno Gransche:

Unnecessary and not impossible. Critique and design as the drivers, challenges, and consequences of accident

Anne-Marie Willis:

Ontological Design, Criticality and What Comes After Design?

18.00

Wrap-Up and Farewell

The conference is organized by the members of the SNSF-funded research project 'Critical Artifacts', led by Prof. Dr. Claudia Mareis and Prof. Michael Renner.

Reference:

CONF: Critical By Design? (Basel, 17-18 May 18). In: ArtHist.net, Apr 22, 2018 (accessed Jul 9, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/17926>>.