Futures past: Design and the Machine (Cambridge, Ma, 21–23 Nov 13)

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FUTURES PAST: Design and the Machine
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Deadline: March 29, 2013

http://descomp.scripts.mit.edu/futurespast/

Call for papers
In 1960, the readers of the IRE Transactions on Human Factors in Electronics encountered J.C.R. Licklider speculating on the future. “The hope,” he contended, “is that, in not too many years, human brains and computer machines would be coupled together very tightly and the resulting partnership will think as no human brain has ever thought.” He called this new cooperative interaction between the human and the computer a “symbiosis.” At that moment, computers were conceptualized either as compliant instruments extending the capabilities of the human subject, or intelligent replacements, automating operations previously performed by the human mind and hand. Positioning himself between the distant prospect of artificial intelligence and the use of machines as mechanical extensions, Licklider declared “symbiosis” a productive way to engage with the changing technological environment.

This manifesto-like proposition coincided with the changing role of technology in design. Faced with the difference between the “symbionts” – the “man” and the “computer” – new research agendas raised questions of method, representation, interaction, and imagination. As computational media pervade design pedagogy and practice, the model of interaction between humans and computers in relation to the creative process persists as a research question, even though consistently obscured by the exigencies of practice. A new encounter with Licklider’s proposition fifty years later will help us rethink and contextualize the relationship between the human, the machine, and design.

This conference invites papers that inquire into the past that preceded, the present that coexisted with, and the future that followed Licklider’s proposition. We are interested in explorations of the assumptions and hypotheses that conditioned the coupling of humans with computational machines, and the debates around the roles of design and designer. Papers that investigate the institutional and intellectual history of human-machine systems and/or situate them within the social and economic context of the second half of the 20th century, are particularly welcome.

Topics include but are not limited to:

• Research laboratories and design thinking

• Scientific methods in design and their critique
• Knowledge transfer and the military-industrial complex
• Interfaces, human-computer interaction and design
• Networks, infrastructure, environmental thinking, and computation
• Computer labs in architecture schools
• Computation in design (architecture) school curricula
• Participatory design tools and methods
• Computation before and after the computer
• Information and the architectural object
• Computational representations and their intellectual history
• Cognitive science, artificial intelligence, and models of the designer
• Experience and computation
• Mediation and media in human-machine systems
• Impact on contemporary pedagogy, research, and practice

In 1960s Licklider anticipated that the immediate future concerned with the agenda of “symbiosis,” would be “intellectually the most creative and exciting in the history of mankind.” Is this future past?

Submission
Please submit your CV and an abstract of 500 words to futurespast@mit.edu by March 29, 2013. Accepted participants will be notified by April 26.

Reference:
CFP: Futures past: Design and the Machine (Cambridge, Ma, 21-23 Nov 13). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 11, 2013 (accessed Oct 6, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/4688>.