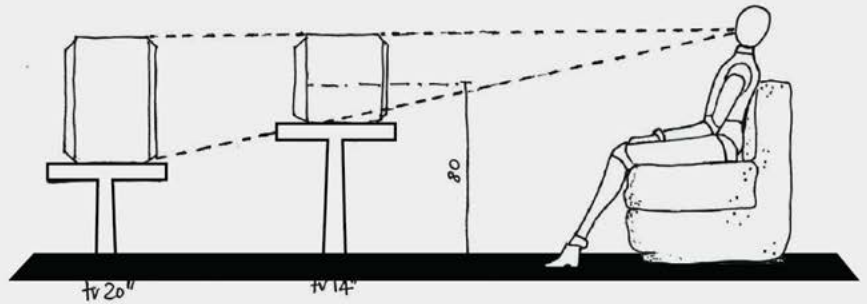


Criteria.

a conference on
critical design

May 20, 2017
Sursock Museum



MENA DESIGN
RESEARCH CENTER

The MENA Design Research Center, in conjunction with Beirut Design Week and in collaboration with the Sursock Museum, is proud to host **Criteria: A Conference on Critical Design**. This two-day event will explore the theories and practices of critical design, an emerging field dedicated to challenging the industrial underpinnings of design and questioning its continued relevance in our quickly changing world. The Criteria panels will bring forward conversations about the theoretical orientations of critical design and its educational applications, as well as critical design as praxis and prototype. The event as a whole aims to connect critical design to other critical turns in the arts, humanities, and social sciences and to distill the value of critical design to this year's Beirut Design Week theme, *Is Design a Need?*

10:00 AM to 11:00 AM

Registration

Sursock Museum Auditorium
Level - 2

11:00 AM to 11:30 AM

Welcome To Criteria

Opening Speech

11:30 AM to 1:30 PM

CRITERIA I: EXPLORING THEORY

Friedrich Von Borries | Toke Riis Ebbesen
Oliver Baron | Karma Dabaghi | Franke Björn

1:30 PM to 2:30 PM

Lunch Break

2:30 PM to 4:30 PM

Criteria 2: Critical Learning

Jana Traboulsi | Promila Roychoudhury
Antonio Cesare Iadarola | Daniel Jasper

4:30 PM to 5:00 PM

Coffee Break

5:00 PM to 6:30 PM

Criteria 3: Prototyping Interventions

Bernd Hopfengärtner | Daisy Alexandra Ginsberg
Amelie Goldfuss | Paco Mejias | Filippo Sanzeni

6:30 PM to 7:30 PM

Criteria Closing Remarks

Criteria I: Exploring Theory

Friedrich von Borries (Invited speaker)

TBD

Björn Franke (Invited speaker)

Between Abstract World and Concrete Theories.

For many, design is the production of useful artefacts. Designing can however also provide a basis for exploration, speculation or critique. This lecture develops this conception further by providing a theoretical framework for conceiving designing and design objects as a mode of and media for philosophical inquiry. Thereby, design is regarded as a material philosophy that explores and reflects philosophical issues by situating them in the concrete and particular reality of human life rather than in a generalized and abstract realm.

Baron, Oliver

What a beautiful ParaSITE!

Looking at Critical Design through philosophical spectacles.

When it comes to criticism, design, unlike fine art, can't move towards total negativity. By losing any connection to function, design would not be design anymore. But if so, what shall those of us who believe in the unique strength of our profession but do not want to contribute to the driving forces of our society, consumerism and control, shall do? In this situation, 'Critical Design' might be the most intelligent method to take action we have developed so far.

As I will examine in my talk, this assumption seems to be true also from the perspective of a philosophical school of thought that had its heyday 50 years ago, but still might provide interesting insides for our purpose: that of 'Critical Theory'. By analysing an object by Michael Rakowitz named 'paraSite' with concepts of T. W. Adorno, I would like to honour the approach of a 'provocative technology' which has an immediate function for a specific user group, but also triggers a self-reflection for an audience. Thereby I will develop terms and criteria to judge design concepts in general.

My talk will end with a brief application of these criteria on the participative design approach as well as on selected social design projects.

Ebbesen, Toke Riis

Useless Critical Design.

According to Raby, critical design creates artefacts in order to "challenge narrow assumptions, preconceptions, and givens about the role products play in everyday life" (Raby, 94 ,2008). Conceived basically as «useless», the value of critical design "ultimately lies in its ability to value: articulate, refuse, critique, spark, turn, transgress, formulate, transform, etc." (Rosenbak, 5.15). However, circulating mainly in "art galleries, conference halls and academic publications" (Blythe, Yauner & Rodgers, 2015), useless critical design artefacts has been criticized for never entering everyday life (Bardzell & Bardzell, 2013). Despise attempts to broaden its reach, it has been argued that most critical design instead "reflect the fears, anxieties, desires, imaginaries, and ultimately, politics of an intellectual, liberal progressive white middle class" (Ansari & Hunt, 4 ,2015). Removed from practical use, critical design may then become another echo chamber for designers, where they can safely repeat the slogans of design modernism without changing the world. The aim of this presentation will be to return to critical design in the light of the concept of use, and thus to critically examine what the use of critical design can be.

Dabaghi, Karma

The Agency of Discursive Design Exists in the Industrial.

It is my position that product designers need to deepen their understanding of Discursive Design, an approach focused on articulating criticism of the status quo, and help it step out of the gallery. By extending the agency of this approach beyond the intellectual realm of the elite, and into the much larger world of the industrial institutions that create and control economies, designers will show new possibilities to the producers of products, reshape their mentalities, and help them to act more responsibly.

As opposed to the commercial product, I advocate for the twenty-first century Activist Discursive Object. This object acts as a catalyzer for change that rejects the old-fashioned model of an individual designer aspiring to create the perfect aesthetic, in favor of a collaborative team-based multidisciplinary practice where comprehensive solutions are offered for the global commons.

Criteria 2: Critical Learning

Jasper, Daniel

Critical Design: As a Matter of Course

Former head of the Design program at Cranbrook Academy, Kathryn McCoy said 'Design is not a neutral, value-free process; however, we have trained a profession that feels political or social concerns are either extraneous to our work or inappropriate.' McCoy described a sort of tacit knowledge (and knowledge production) that became codified within the Western academy after World War II in which formal design production typically results in concrete statements couched in positive terms, which celebrate consumerism, consumer products and the munificent culture that produced them.

Theorist Guy Debord characterized the psycho-philosophical underpinnings of this mediated environment in the following terms, 'Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear.' In this regard design (graphic, product, apparel) acts as the process by which this self-congratulatory monologue is made flesh, expressed physically in the form of what seem to be ideologically inert objects.

As design educators, practitioners and scholars in a historically incurious profession one might be forgiven for asking is this all there is? Is client-based practice the only prescribed outcome for our intellectual and creative endeavors and those of our students? In addition to critical thinking and critical writing, is there room for critical design in design research, pedagogy and practice?

Traboulsi, Jana

A Design Manifesto: A critique of Graphic Design education.

This paper proposes a critical look at the state of graphic design and visual communication in Lebanon today. These fields have witnessed a boom in the last twenty years in the country, with the opening of numerous schools and university programs, but also the flourishing of advertising agencies and design studios. The time has come to stop and think critically of how this field has and can affect the society it grows in and is a product of. As a practitioner in the fields of design and illustration mainly, but also as an academic, I will base myself on my professional experience to propose a series of concerns about design thinking as a social, cultural and political act.

Iadarola, Antonio Cesare

Future Workscape: Collaboration Space for Knowledge Work

This contribution analyses Placemaking and User Experience Design of collaborative workspaces, namely coworking, with particular attention in constructing new scenarios that foster enriching collaboration for knowledge worker.

The main driver for coworkers to operate from a collaborative space is the access to knowledge and diverse complementary expertise.

The introduction of speculative design within a wider framework of participatory design processes helps both to construct possible futures where coworking environments can claim knowledge as their main value offer and to design services, policies and space adaptation to purpose.

Under this lens, neither human centered design nor critical design complete the task to comprehensively decide how these spaces should be strategically designed to be equally suitable for the “now” and the “next” social and technological climate.

The paper and the workshop will aim at defining a methodological space between critical design and human centered design. The former in its capacity to understand preferences, expectation and struggles of collaboration space users; the latter to provoke a stronger attitude in extracting information in the present and translate them into actionable insights to generate a level of criticism on the actual value and meaning of work within a knowledge economy.

Criteria 3: Prototyping Interventions

Mejias, Paco + Tanzil Shafique

Welcome To Bordertown: A Prefab Solution Of Border Walls For Social Encounters.

Rather than a line that divides, the border must be reconceptualized as a place of social enrichment with the other, an osmotic frontier for a cultural and emotional exchange. What is the role of critical design in this? We will present the theoretical idea behind the design and illustrate it by means of sample-prefabricated modules for border walls, which can be mass produced and exported all over the world wherever there is border conflict. The pieces will have the required condition for a border—it will separate people from both sides (only physically)—but it will encourage all kind of non-material exchange (services, information and emotions) through curious juxtapositions of the programs. This idea has been explored by projecting artifacts (drawings of the prefab wall solutions)—coalesced into a catalogue of the different pieces. Ordering from this catalogue, a border could be assembled as the context demands and yet perversely negate its role to separate people. We welcome you to Bordertown, the seed of a new city where mutual curiosity and understanding will be able to overcome political, social or economic barriers.

Bernd Hopfengärtner (Invited speaker)

Life is good for now: Fictional Scenes in Future Constellation.

Let's say, in the coming years, Switzerland has managed to fully realize the right of informational self determination devising a functional infrastructure to protect it. Every citizen would have total control of their personal data, granting or denying access to anyone else. Huge data collections would be accumulated, but with people's knowledge and consent. The power of data analysis to improve medical treatment, uncover hidden relationships or design more efficient systems could be fully harnessed, without having to worry about its dark sides. This hypothetical future allows to refocus from the dangers of data abuse to the logic of data analysis. How would it condition the way we think about ourselves, our relationships, how we tell stories?

In my work, I'm interested in the wayward little scenes that emerge when the big scenarios come alive. Little scenes, partial and open that do not aim to solve problems or design solutions but explore and rig out small spaces in the realm of the thinkable.

Davin Browner Conaty, Filippo Sanzeni, Minwoo Kim

Artificial Intelligence and Future Agency

Can transparent systems, applied to pervasive artificial intelligence, make for safer future social environments? Design is a need in emerging contexts regarding new technologies, such as artificial intelligence. We think there needs to be a further shift in emphasis focused towards designing in relation to the distinct relationship between language, interactions, systems and agency embodied in these new technologies.

Design shouldn't just show people how to use technology, but also show how it is using them. As designers, we should be creating new hybrid affordances and visual cues to make this dynamic relationship explicit. We have explored scenarios in which personal autonomy and agency are overridden by an artificial intelligence system. So how should we respond to this new limiting factor over free will? Should we cede some of autonomous control in favour of heteronomous control? What are the ethical implications of this?

We think that in order to start public debate and discussion we need to define objects and systems not as static products but as open evolving and dynamic sets of relations between different technologies. Alexa or Google Home feel physically singular but these products are part of an ecosystem of relations, which works as real world computational control over human behaviour. Further, we want to emphasise that these are mostly silent and intangible computations, which need to be explicitly designed and controlled with these considerations in mind.

Daisy Alexandra Ginsberg (Invited speaker)

Better

Designers often advocate that design makes things better. In promising a better future, they are not alone: engineers, marketers, politicians and scientists also invoke the imaginary of better, creating dreams that have very material effects. In some of these visions, "better" will be delivered by science and technology; in others, the consumption of designed things will better us or the world. "Better" itself has become a contemporary version of progress, shed of some of its philosophical baggage. But it is not a universal good or a verified measure: better is imbued with politics and values. And better will not be delivered equally, if at all. "What is better?" and "Who gets to decide?" are questions with great implications for the way we live and hope to live. This talk explores how critical design can be used to address these questions, while considering critical design's complicated relationship to bettering, as a critical yet optimistic practice. Drawing on my experiences working with the visionaries of synthetic biology — a new approach to genetic engineering — I consider how critical design and its position of critical optimism can usefully question better, and open up the possibility for alternatives.

Amelie Goldfuss (Invited speaker)

Fantastic Devices: Design fiction as stimulant for thought

Design fiction has made it into museums and galleries. It's supposed to act as a stimulant for thought instead of satisfying practical needs and has done its job considerably well. But how can we bring fiction back from the gallery into everyday life? And how are we getting from fiction to action? I'm going to present fictional devices that are meant to be planted in real homes. Do we perceive such devices differently in different settings and over different periods of time? How close do we need (or want) to get to both, objects and people? Can these devices act as tools for design research as well as objects for thought? In short: What can design do and where can it go from here?

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