

CURATED SESSION

Design, relational ontologies and futurescaping

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ABSTRACT

The core matter we address in this session is how we may live and learn together; relationally, ontologically and anticipatorily, in designerly/ing ways that allow the 'not yet' into the present moment (Miller, 2018). This is a question of care, an 'ethics of caring' (e.g. Tronto, 2013) in the present that challenges orthodox views of designing, for pedagogical praxis, design research and engagement.

This curated session addresses these issues with reference to the dynamics of making and making sense. It draws on a decade of Design education and Design research projects and shared work located in an emergent assemblage of design-based inquiry through the Cape To Cape network between South Africa and Norway. Our distributed, co-created and shared sensibility is connected to the location and refinement of 'shaping futures' by way of building a fluid understanding of an assembly of relations between context and conditions, legacies and prospects. In this, our project cases have been education-based yet also public facing in terms of participatory processes and engagement.

Moving from Deleuze to Braidotti to Barad, we trace relational ontological perspectives by reading between the theory and our pedagogical praxis; between practicing, making and doing in the field to research inquiry that diffractively illuminates the effects and affect of our experimental work in various places and spaces. We view place, environment and context not merely as location, but rather "'the everywhere'—the inner and outer; the earth, the sky and the ocean; the home as the world given and the world of our own creation" (Fry, 2012, p. 3).

A relational ontologies perspective is one of event-as-process, where 'becoming together' (Deleuze, 1987) and not just 'being together' acknowledges and works with the emergent relationality of relations as they come into play through pedagogical events and interventions. Our perspective and approach "is a question of arraying oneself in an open space, of holding space, of maintaining the possibility of springing up at any point..." (Deleuze, 1987, p. 353).

We share with Kearnes (2006) the view that “Design is always in a process of ontogenesis because it is in a complex relationship to a world that is itself complex and in motion: design contributes to such dynamism at the same time as being affected by this world of becoming” (paraphrased by Brassett, 2015, p. 32). In this the “ontological incompleteness of design” is signalled (Kearnes, 2006, p. 20). Design scholars Fry and Willis have expanded the concept of ‘ontological design’ and the importance, from a sustainability perspective, of how ‘design designs’. Ontological designing according to Willis is: ‘(i) a hermeneutics of design concerned with the nature and of the agency of design, which understands design as a subject-decentred practice, acknowledging that things as well as people design, and following on from this, (ii) an argument for particular ways of going about design activity, especially in the contemporary context of ecological unsustainability’ (Willis, 2006, p.70). Barad’s term, ‘agential realism’ further articulates such agentic action as intelligibility understood to be “an ontological performance of the world in its ongoing articulation” where “knowing is not a bounded or closed practice but an ongoing performance of the world” (2007, p. 149). In this view, design for sustainability is about matters concerning not only the sustainability of the designed object itself but the design of the relations located in current and future contexts (Fry, 2009).

We draw on Barad’s (2007) concept of *diffracting* as a methodological ‘cut’ to open up and illuminate the emergent learning and futuring phenomena that may be enabled through experimental pedagogy and practice-based design inquiry. We advocate for a process of learning about learning that acknowledges our diffracting effect as actors in a processual and participatory pedagogy.

We refer to the notion of futurescaping as a mode and a means to make material the imaginary with the situational, the co-creative with the critical. For SUPERFLUX (Jain et al, 2012: online), ‘... design futurescaping channels multiple voices to create hybrid, humane alternatives to the deterministic, “business-as-usual” consensus future’. As a form of public engagement, they see futurescaping as suited to ‘a future evermore deeply entangled in inter- and intra-dependent networks of people, artefacts, systems, and services’.

Similarly, in this Curated Session, we offer some of the ways we have approached the complexities of anticipating change towards survivable and sustainable futures. We do so by referring to experimentation in university level design education and nomadic pedagogy (with a travelling tiger fish), sustainable design practices and communities (including dragonflies), and the

articulation of co-creative imaginaries in design fiction (through the anticipatory persona of an otopus). Our work spans the desert sands of Namibia to the melting ice of the western Arctic. We present these through three linked acts of design based 'shaping futures': Provoking, Diffracting, Assembling. We suggest that such acts of shaping futures ontologically via design-ing (Lury, et al, 2018) may contribute to the emerging domain of Anticipation Studies.

We describe long term sustainability as a critical perspective on the appropriateness of design for local contexts and cultural settings. It implies a future-orientated design thinking where new alternative designs and alternative scenarios (that are in touch with reality) create critique on societal change and the responsibility of sustainable societal decisions and actions. We aim to unpack long term sustainability by drawing on the emergent field of discursive design methods as a critique of criticality and critical design. We also draw on the understanding that speculative design emerged from critical design. Therefore, we position the performative exploration of design foresight within the intersectionality of speculative design and discursive design as a critical design study.

We argue for the fostering of stronger links between design studies and future studies. We propose that the modality of design foresight may be recast anticipatorially is through performativity and the enactment of speculative design(ed) scenarios of futurescaping.

This curated session will move from presentations of exploratory work done in South Africa and Norway as prompts, towards an open dialogue within the session to gather inputs and critique from all present. In this way, we anticipate that momentums will be generated, which can then be leveraged by session participants in their ongoing futuring work.

Session speakers

This curated session will be led by: Prof Andrew Morrison, Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO), Norway (with experience in design fiction, design methods and futures literacies) and with participation from: Mr Corbin Raymond: Stellenbosch University (SUN), South Africa; Mr Bruce Snaddon, Dr Aletta Chisin, Ms Monica di Ruvo: Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) South Africa; and Prof Amanda Steggell: Oslo National Academy of the Arts (KHiO), Norway.