

SUB
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THOUGHTS

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FOREWORD: HYBRIDITY IS THE CONTEMPORARY PARADIGM OF DESIGN.

Design, as it is often understood in a traditional way, is about tangible materials and crafty processes. However, design has been using digital tools since the 1960's. Using these tools created a shift of design from the workshop to the screen. The object of design, in our contemporary 'culture of digitality' (Felix Stalder: Kultur der Digitalität, Frankfurt 2018) is therefore not primarily the serially produced artifact of industrial design anymore. We are rather creating processes of interaction with meaningful artifacts. At the same time, it would be a misunderstanding of design to assume that industrial design has shifted completely into the digital sphere and is forgetting its material origins. Our immaterial tools in design (especially in recent years) are always linked to specific materials, processes and actors.

Essentially, the phenomenon of digitality in contemporary design seems to depend as well on processes of implementation and materialization as it depends on codes. These phenomena are located in a hybrid space between digital and analogue instead of using digitality as a mere tool or technical entity to design simulations for consumer products. Strategies that have been originally developed in a »digital« context are now being transferred back again onto a structural, material and conceptual level within design. To make sense of this back-and-forth movement between the digital and the physical world, we need to question the borders that have formerly marked our thinking about design.

All papers presented in this conference are thus addressing the question of design in some way. Their notion of interaction also shows: The discourse around digitality in design would benefit from a term that lies beyond the dichotomy of material culture and digital technique: the interface. A hybrid concept of the interface could help to frame the complexity and multi-layeredness of contemporary design processes. The concept of interface is productive to the extent that it always puts design in relation to use. Previous design concepts have missed that point. Form Follows Function - probably the most powerful paradigm - simply associated the user with functionality. This can be shown most obviously in Le Corbusier's concept of the Modulor, where the human became a standardized formal entity. In contrast to that, postmodern design focussed on meaning and on the semantics of design, to break the paradigm of functionality. With the ubiquity of digitality, products and services became so complex that both strategies were abandoned, and the users with all their needs came into view.

The hybrid interface of contemporary design is essentially aiming at the category of perception and the experience of the digital – we are discussing this in

the panel 'Redefining Perception'. Of course, the interface is not merely understood as the surface of the screen, of course, but as a more general concept of interaction with artifacts, tools and communications (Gui Bonsiepe: Interface. Design neu Begreifen. Mannheim 1993, p. 20). The new paradigm of interaction then concerns design at all levels: Firstly, us as designers who create new products because we develop them by using digital tools. Then, as a next step, the transformation of these tools, as they are further developed, modified and re-designed by the designers in order to create new things (being discussed in the panel 'Creative AI'). Secondly, there are those interfaces that we all encounter in everyday life, in a variety of forms, and that open up the world around us (which we want to discuss in the panel 'Probing Change'). One could say that the interface has long been so ubiquitous that it can be described as the new paradigm of design par excellence. We can therefore no longer speak of 'the interface'. We should be talking about interfaces in different ways and create different terms of 'interfaces': The user's singularity of perception, of his or her or cis body and other singularities are of importance. In Donna Haraway's Cyborg Manifesto, for example, the gender dualism dissolves with the dissolution of the border between body and technology. This ambiguity and hybridity must be considered when designing interfaces ('Empowering Human Bodies'). Further, the political entanglement of a networks of actors in connection with the interface needs to be taken into consideration. Also, the demand for user participation is of importance, and finally the fact that even participation does not always imply transparency but that it can lead to a not-so-good platform capitalism is a matter of concern ('Practicing Ethics'). Finally, we have to deal with the new world around us, which we can, for instance, by probing self-awareness ('Educating Ourselves').

In all these concepts of the interface, we are assuming a new 'Super-Human'. For the 'Super-Human', openness, transparency and participation seem more crucial than borders, specific terms and presuppositions or the absolute relation of form and function. The Super-Human is suggesting both a productive term of digitality and of the interface, emphasizing the hybridity of contemporary digital culture.

— Annika Frye, Program Chair

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